A TALE IN EVERYTHING

BY

GODFREY
LOCKER LAMPSON

LONDON: PETER DAVIES
1934

Published in February, 1934

Printed for Peter Davies Ltd. by Latimer Trend & Co.,
Mount Pleasant, Plymouth

By the same Author

THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

O Reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle Reader! you would find
A tale in everything.

Wordsworth

CONTENTS

Some of these papers have appeared in the *National Review*, *Cornhill Magazine*, *London Mercury*, *English Review* and *Country Life*, to the editors of which my thanks are due.

A TALE IN EVERYTHING

I

MARCH DAYS

It has often been said that courtship rather than possession, anticipation than fulfilment, are the happiest moments in the lives of men. For possession and fruition fall short of expectancy, and thus is disillusion bred. This is why spring has a quality which neither summer nor autumn possess. Summer can oppress with its glare and heat, and autumn saddens with its beautiful decay. But there is no surfeit nor sadness in early spring. Hope is enshrined there and gratitude, and a picture takes shape in fancy of sapphire days and warm moonlit nights as you spy the earliest green in the hedgerows and the first almond blossom on the tree. On the very heels of winter, before ever he is out at the door, there are premonitions of approaching change —a blackbird's fluting note, a something in the atmosphere on milder days, a stirring in Earth's sleep, the way the light falls on last year's herbage—imaginings that melt away, wishes perhaps that are father to the thought, and yet recur and yet again, vanishing suddenly for weeks on end. And then, without warning, comes an hour in March when there is no more doubt. Spring has arrived at last, surreptitiously, on tiptoe, while you were looking the other way. The pastures and the woods acclaim her,

the waters of the mere, the beasts of the field and fowls of the air, and the heart of man.

On Jefson's farm that afternoon it was the first real day of spring, for a merciless east wind had blown for the past three weeks without intermission and with an edge like a kris. He had previously been head gamekeeper and, on retirement, thanks to a legacy, had rented a farm on the outskirts of the park. The young squire and his friends used to delight in his company. Many's the time when walking up rabbits, if the latter were scarce, he would take a live one out of an enormous inner pocket, and, dropping it covertly into a tuft of fog, pretend he had started it and shout to the guns. He had even been known, in too long a lull of the firing, when helping behind with the beaters, to yell 'Woodcock forward', though not a feather had been seen, and to let off his gun at intervals to create an impression of lethal activity in the rear and pleasant anticipations of heavy bombardment for the sportsmen stationed at the other end. During those keepering days no one had been a greater terror to the poaching fraternity and he had figured in many an affray. On the last occasion two of his ribs had been broken, and his back so bludgeoned that his bent shoulders still bore witness to the savagery of the encounter, though he had dealt some shrewd blows in return before succumbing to superior numbers. Now at length he had become a man of peace, rearing pigs and poultry and milking his cows without a thought for the pheasants that roosted not far from his bedroom window. It was rumoured, however, that the poachers still remembered his handling in the past,

when he used to set upon them with a loaded stick and a couple of heavy night-dogs, and avoided meeting him whenever they could. It was in these pigs of his that he took a peculiar pride, aye, for which he felt a genuine affection—large whites crossed with middle-whites, producing porkers not so long in the back and legs as either of those, which he used to assert ran too much to lean, nor so close to the ground as some of the other mixed breeds, which were apt in the eyes of the butchers to be overfat. There was a record lot that had littered from a huge brood-sow the day before, seventeen of them in all; but three of the weakest, born last, had been destroyed, and only fourteen were left. In a large kennel on a bed of straw the sow lay stretched upon her side, offering a vast expanse of belly to the ravenous mouths that gave her not a moment's peace. From time to time she emitted a sleepy grunt, whether from fatigue or pleasure it was difficult to guess. As, however, the teats numbered only twelve, two of her offspring were always without one and had to take their chance of snatching a meal. Jefson thought that eleven of the litter would be sufficient, as, if there were more, the whole of them would suffer, so was going to give away, to be brought up by hand, three of the least sturdy the following day. It was amazing, he remarked, to watch the little fellows running about with bright, wide-open eyes almost immediately they were born, and the craft they evinced at a few hours old in seizing the teats and holding on against all comers was certainly a sight not to be missed. In about eight weeks' time they would be weaned and he was going to bring

the mother back into condition with milk and potatoes, 'put a bloom on her', as he described it, and then send her off to a show where, being of pedigree stock, she might fetch a fair price, for she would take a lot of feeding if kept all the winter.

In an adjoining kennel was another big sow expected to go down any time. She was evidently a favourite of Jefson's, for, when he began to rub her great pendulous belly, she sank down in a kind of delicious deliquium, and, as he continued to pass his rough hand over her dugs, grunted her appreciation. It was supposed to help the business along, he said. However, it was not always you could get on with a sow. Some of them had devilish tempers when they had a litter, as he knew to his cost. A few years previously one had farrowed in that very kennel and, on going in to feed her, he had picked up a piglet to test its weight, when the sow had turned upon him in a rage and driven him into a corner, holding him at bay there. Luckily he had had a bucket with him, and in self-defence had beaten her with it till it was completely flattened out, but she had still tried to get at him with open jaws. He had then thrust the end of the pail between her teeth, whereupon she clamped them down upon it in a fury and with a twist of her powerful neck swung him right round, fortunately, however, in the direction of the door through which he escaped. What patience, anxiety and hope, what sense of accomplishment, what love, contentment, hunger, what will to suffer and to live, were in those two kennels that March day! What an endless, ever-swelling procession of pigs there would be from these two

families; what huge mountains of succulent, sustaining food for towns as yet unbuilt and people as yet unborn! And in thousands of such homesteads reproduction was in progress that spring morning.

There were a number of lambs outside the lodge gate in a field of young grass occupied by another tenant, an up-to-date farmer of the newer sort. Covered pens had been erected in the lee of a wood for the ewes about to drop their burden, and several rough shelters roofed with straw were dotted about in the open against the bitter blasts at night that blew from the Peak. The lambs seemed to be regarded by their owner as prospective joints only, to be tended with care and provided for with all the skill at his command until fit for the cleaver, but otherwise as devoid altogether of interest and evoking not a spark of pleasure on their own account. The butchers took them at twelve or fourteen weeks, or sometimes a little more in the case of twins, the latter not being so well developed as the single births. In the bright sunshine they were frisking round the ewes, skipping and leaping, the joyfullest picture imaginable of innocent youth in its first sweet freshness. And ever and anon they would attack the udders of the dams, bumping and charging at them without mercy to get a proper purchase, and, as with legs splayed out or on their knees they drank the life-sustaining stream, ecstatically wagging their long tails. When thus besieged, the mother would sometimes unconcernedly move on, slightly bored or knowing there was no more milk on tap for the moment, or maybe regarding it as a kind of discipline for a little too forward an eagerness and the

taking of things too much for granted. Some of these babes were only a couple of days old, ludicrously long in the leg and slightly unsteady, but as greedy and wanton as the rest, gazing at you enquiringly with their small black faces and skittish mien. They were the very epitome of early spring, and it was fit they should enjoy life while there was yet time, for in three short months they would be offered up as a sacrifice on the murderous altar of human hunger. Shameful, indeed, in the midst of this enchanting scene that visions of mint sauce should occasionally intrude upon the mind!

Nearby the rooks were building in the topmost branches of the ash trees. In the previous May nearly all the fledglings had been shot by the farmers for the sake of the crops, and only the old birds, with a few exceptions, had been left behind. Muir, the bailiff of the estate, had his own ideas about the rooky population. He maintained that they lived for over a hundred years and that most of the young ones migrated each winter to some other site, leaving their forefathers to carry on. He pointed out, in support of the theory, that a rookery never increased in size from year to year, though the annual holocaust might partly account for this. Whatever the actual truth, a rookery, like a village, unless engulfed by a growing town, will retain its individuality from generation to generation and, in favoured places, from century to century. The rook is the most respectable and dignified of birds. He loves order, tradition, and historical continuity. Muir knew of a man on the Stock Exchange who had purchased a property with a fine avenue of limes leading to the house. Over and over again this terri-

torial upstart had tried to tempt rooks to build there, obtaining nests from a neighbouring rookery and, at considerable risk to those employed, planting them high up in his own trees; even going so far as to nail shoulders of mutton to the branches for possible visitants to peck at. He also imported young rooks from other districts and kept them in cages in the avenue, feeding them for several weeks and then giving them their liberty. It was not, however, of the slightest use. They would not stay, much less lay an egg. Muir, who was acquainted with the man's agent, had prophesied at the time that it would be mere waste of money, for, he averred, it took three generations of a family in the same seat before rooks would look at it. An ancient country mansion, standing in a park, with an avenue or a thick clump or two of elm or ash is what they appear to like best, or some old college walk or cathedral close. It is tradition they seem to be fond of, a place where there is an old proprietary stock. But once they have firmly established themselves, it takes a cataclysmic upheaval to turn them out. You may destroy three-quarters of the rookery and yet they will cleave to it, replenishing their ranks the following season. You may try every kind of deterrent and persecution and, if only the trees are spared and remain sound, they will face it out, whatever treatment is meted out to them. The love of home rises superior to every rebuff. They are the aristocracy of our feathered world, not the smart set with its frivolous plumage and light song, but the great order of exclusive county families that by birth, breeding and tradition supply the counsellors, diplomats, statesmen, augurs and social oracles

for the rest of the avian race. A rookery, Muir used to say, was a centre for the whole of the bird life round it. Although it might pass unnoticed, the other birds were usually more silent when a rooks' solemn conclave was taking place, for in that sable parliament laws were debated concerning standards of conduct and other such weighty matter that left their impression on all the flying host. Their code was a stern one and the punishment for offenders fitted the fault. For a slight misdemeanour a nest might be partially destroyed and have to be rebuilt; for the graver sort the culprit would be expelled from the colony to seek a home elsewhere. But for an unforgivable crime he would be set in the midst of his peers on an open patch of ground. They would sit round him in judgment, grim and at first in silence. Muir had once witnessed such a scene. Arguments would be heard for and against, obvious counsel for the defendant employed, even the public admitted at a respectful distance, and then, if found guilty, the prisoner, utterly crestfallen, with sunken head and drooping wings, would be pecked to death without pity in the view of all. Does anyone doubt the sagacity of these grave and law-abiding birds? If only we could understand their discussions and interpret those raucous cries as they go about their business throughout the year, man surely would learn something to his advantage regarding the economy of the home, the duty of the citizen to the State, the pursuit of communal aims undeflected by sectional or selfish interests. There is no more homely, yet arresting, spectacle than a string of rooks returning from the fields of an evening. As the gloom

gathers in the landscape, in they come from their feeding grounds after following the plough and harrow, one after another in slow and stately procession, silhouetted against the darkening sky, uttering their harsh salutations as they approach and drop into the trees. It is a sight that is worth the seeing, these black-coated senators going home to bed. On this sunny day in March they were busily engaged repairing the old nests, a few of the young birds, spared from last May's slaughter, building new ones. What a ceaseless babel they kept up, what comings and goings, what bickerings and advice, what scornful repartee and sage reminder, what jealousies and unconcealed contempt! And soon all this pother would have quieted down, the speckled eggs would be lying on the swaying platforms, and a period of comparative quiescence would ensue. And then, a little later, yet another generation would see the light of day to carry on the old tradition and learn the ancient lore. They are almost the earliest heralds of a new-born world. When they assemble, swinging ever higher over last year's nests, calling to one another, provocatively, noisily, you may guess that a change is very near. They have felt it in their airy kingdom, under those sooty mantles. A new life has begun to stir, the urge of reproduction, the romance of rebirth; and though the cold east winds may blow and never a bird's sweet song be heard for many days, as you listen to the turmoil of the rookery there is an answering surge in your own breast, a welling from the deeps of instinct, and you know that spring is not far off.

But it is in the hushed penetralia of the woods

that, quietly and unobserved, you may catch her first light footfall and earliest-taken breath, indrawn with so ghostly a sigh that, had you not been listening, it would never have reached your ears; that you may detect the first imprint of those flying feet which soon will be racing through the valleys and over the hills and plains of waiting England. The first anemone is in flower, palely glimmering in the undergrowth, and near it are the earliest leaves of the hyacinth which in a few weeks will carpet the forests with its misty blue. A hen-pheasant has just crossed one of the glades, shyly, as though pursued, and rapidly hidden herself in a thicket on the other side, while close behind, a moment later, stalks her magnificent suitor, gorgeously apparelled, with head erect, slowly and proudly stepping in her wake. And other plants are there, modest ones, putting forth their stems and convoluted leaves to carry and protect the precious flowerlet, the coming glory of their brief career; and many diverse birds, chippering and piping in the naked branches, rehearsing their parts, feebly as yet, for the grand symphony of passion that soon will flood the land. In the stillness about you, withdrawn from all disturbing sights and sounds, you hear the stealthy preparations going forward and you glimpse the head of the procession, that mighty cavalcade of Youth, entering the portals of this vast cathedral, while the first strains of the organ are trembling overhead.

The teeming piggeries, the lambs, the rooks, the pale windflowers, the budding twigs, proclaim the advent of softer hours, and, though you turn up the collar of your coat as you follow the footpath across the fields, you whistle as you go.

II

THE COTTAGE

As your locks get scantier and greyer and your limbs less supple than they used to be, how vividly the scenes of thirty, forty years ago are thrown upon the screen of memory! With a thousand silken threads the heart is tugged at by images of the Past. It is the Past that you are inclined to dwell upon more than the Present or the Future, and the pictures that emerge are not so much the decisive turnings in your poor, pathetic story—marriage, war, deaths, illnesses—but trivial far-off things that at the time scarce made a ripple on the surface of Fate, but seemed part of Time itself, of the tideless current of peaceful, uneventful days.

Among such is a cottage which, of all the habitations of man, I love the best. When it comes back to the mind, it is on a flood of scents, sound and colour that the lapse of years has failed to extinguish, and which to-day are fresh as ever they were. The honeysuckle in the hedge, the mignonette in the border, the wallflowers by the porch, the roses and the may, steal upon one with a wave of perfume as though they were actually in the room. So too with the strip of lawn with the wagtails running over it, and the robin perched on the sill, and the pine-needles strewing the gravel path, and the cat slink-

ing through the shrubbery. Sharply they are featured for the inward eye as ever they were wont to be in fact. Likewise with the noises of day and night—the blackbird fluting in the early morning, the mower whetting his scythe, the tinkle of a rivulet, the scraping of a beech bough in the wind, a pheasant going up to roost. You listen to them all once more, identical in strength and tone. Thus youth is lived again: so cannot even age deprive you wholly of the past. One of the scenes enacted with reprehensible regularity rises before me now as I hearken to the rumble of a great city. It is the figure of James Macpherson carrying a small paper parcel, tied with string. He was head gardener, short and stocky, with a broad Scots brogue, a long clean-shaven upper lip and reddish beard. Suspicious of every other employee and jealous of not a few, he was a devoted servant of the family at the big house, and regarded the younger members of it almost as though they were offspring of his own. No other interest beyond these had he in life, and supervising the affairs of the garden and helping in the management of the estate; for he was a confirmed bachelor, with simple tastes and a disposition to save, and the limit of his excursions from one year's end to the other would be a local horticultural show or two, and, on rarer occasions, some floral exhibition farther afield. He was partial also to a mouthful of whisky, like others of his race, and unfriendly critics would hint that they had encountered him going home of an evening when a slight lapse from the vertical had momentarily contrasted with the sturdy uprightness of the inner man. How clearly he stands

forth, photographed upon the mental retina nearly forty years ago, a portrait which has survived so many others that have long since faded and disappeared from view.

I can see him carrying the parcel with a self-conscious, half-guilty air as he passed acquaintances in the carriage drive. It looked as though it contained a cardboard box which might have held anything—a pair of shoes that wanted mending or some other domestic commodity to be committed to the post. A trifle gingerly he bore it by a loop in his right hand, a little stiffly, yet with an effort of unconcern, if anyone stopped him for a chat on the way. All this I used to mark from the window where I sat awaiting his arrival. For during the greater part of the year the big house was let and I lived in seclusion in a cottage opposite the entrance gate, spending the week-ends there, cared for by Mrs. Grimes, a middle-aged lodge-keeper who dwelt across the way, a thin little body with an injured and slightly sour expression, but a superlative cook, her crisply-browned rice puddings a revelation of what could be done with that uninspiring grain, her roast fowls a model of the culinary art. A great stickler for convention, she cannot always have approved. For her there was a loss of dignity in the son of the house sleeping in a cottage, while aliens snored in the rooms he had been born to. She was a childless woman and I believe she almost loved me as a mother, those acidulated features melting into softer lines as she sometimes stood and watched me at my solitary meal. Yes, there was Macpherson coming through the lodge gate with the brown-

paper parcel in his hand. It looked so innocent, but was not so guiltless as it seemed. With what cunning upon that hairy countenance would he lay it upon the table and furtively undo the string. 'I have braaht a peach for ye'—and resting upon a quilt of spotless wool were three or four voluptuous 'Noblesse', with velvet cheeks upturned, their delicate pallor tinged with the faintest flush of conscious beauty. Out of the hothouse they had come, a building let with the mansion, demised with all its exotic and delicious contents for the term of the lease. It was rank robbery, larceny unabashed, and I was the receiver of the stolen goods, or, at best, an accessory after the fact. Not that the tenants would have grudged the fruit, though that was no excuse. With what undignified haste I wolfed it down; with what ecstasy, while the luscious juices spurted and overflowed—one peach after another, until none were left. For Mrs. Grimes must never suspect, lest an accidental word should escape abroad; so the stones were flung far out into the bushes and the skins trodden into the loose soil of the nearest flower-bed. At twenty you do these things, rejoicing and unashamed, but with the advance of the years the letter of the law becomes a tyrant and respectability usurps the throne of fun.

It was beneath the roof of that beloved shelter that many hours were spent digging in the treasures of the English classics; there too that were poured out the frenzies of its youthful tenant's heart, lines long since burnt and quite forgotten. The hard study and passionate hours are wellnigh expunged from memory—hardly a trace seems to be left. All

that survive from that fairy time are a few quaint figures, distinct in outline as ever, and a trifling incident or two, stamped into the brain, when searing disappointments and fateful decisions have utterly melted away. It was another world, another life, so painful at times that anguish almost rent the breast asunder. Yet who would not live it again, who lived it once, to breathe that morning air and face those flushing dawns, when the body was tireless and elastic and miracles of hope and faith took place every day; when visions of untranslatable beauty floated alongside as you trod the woods and fields, and vast panoramas of romance spread to the edge of the world as you gazed out upon it? Now is all drear and darkly unconvincing. As you look around, there are huge heaps of ashes, some of them still smoking, others cold and dead. The dawns have turned to sunsets and the miracles of faith to endless questioning.

The woods that surrounded the cottage were a veritable sanctuary of bird life. Great and small there were of these wild, feathered beings; from the lordly heron, that wandered to and fro between the ponds on slowly beating wing, to the minute firecrest that hung her invisible nest from a branch of the yew beneath the window. To catch the first cuckoo's note, wafted upon the breath of an April noon; to wait on tiptoe by the hazels for the magic music of a May night; to watch the pigeons in a high wind coming in for shelter to a clump of larch; to listen to the mallard passing overhead with singing flight in autumn's dusk by the lake's edge—these were delights that never could be stale. What bird

was there that was not beautiful? Winged wizards, necromancers all, they made a fairyland of meadow, copse and sky. No sadder landscape can there be than where birds are not. The very life has been extracted, the mystery and charm. They are a link between us and the angels, earth and Heaven, the visible and invisible. Their message issues from the remote past, from the earliest days of the planet, before sin and punishment; aye, earlier still, for they are voices from where there is no death. They sing the language also of the future, music that will fill the spheres when there is no more pain. Spirits of no time or epoch, immortal youth is theirs, eternal joy.

There was a particular oak coppice with a large pool in its midst which every kind of local bird seemed to visit. A rich sward, nibbled closely by the rabbits, bounded it on one side and mossy banks with a stockade of rushes closed it in on the others. Fed by a clear runnel that issued from it again to make a scampering brook lower down in the wood, it was never stagnant or muddy, and on cloudless summer days was a deep amethystine blue, skimmed by dragon-flies of every colour. Here one could lie on hot afternoons, watching the warblers clinging to the reeds and the white cups of the lilies reflected in the water's depths. There was not a sound but was made by some wild creature or by one of Nature's processes. The human race might never have existed, for there was not a sign of any human hand. It might have been the Garden of Eden before the advent of Man. No fitter spot could have been found for quiet meditation, removed as it was from the world's highway in a setting of perpetual peace.

What did success matter here, or failure? What was success? Of all questions it was the hardest. The answers were many, but were any of them right? It was easier to say what success was not—to have made a mountain of money and be conscious that you have no place in the affections of those for whom you spend it and whom you love—to have attained eminence at the sacrifice of all leisure—although possessing plenty, to yearn for something different—to wring all you can out of life and to be aware that those whose regard you would have dislike or despise you—to have achieved a position beyond your merits, and be reminded of it every day—to have been on the best terms with the 'best' people, and gone in fear of discovery of some vice or deed—whatever else you may possess, to have a poisonous thorn in the flesh that you cannot tear out—these are not success. Your obituary notices may say so, but *you* will have known better. What 'successful' men and women we see about us; yet, if we had to take their miseries too, we would not exchange places for all the wealth of Israel!

It was in the stilly summer nights that the cottage and its garden were at their best; when the moon rode above the landscape and the music of a waterfall was the only persistent sound. A bat would be flickering about the eaves, while from time to time an owl would utter its mournful cry and the whirring of a nightjar be heard in the distance like an incantation. A rat would cross the garden path and a bird stir in the rhododendrons, while the glow-worm hung her lamp as a beacon for her mate in the short grasses. The cottage was transfigured at such

an hour; the creepers turned to silver, the impenetrable yew spectral and immovable beside the door. The white flowers shone starrily in their beds and the cockchafer drove past on booming wing. Unearthly was the scene, bedewed in splendour in the eerie light. The tall limes that dominated the big house could be discerned towering, a misty blur. What were they all expecting, waiting for? Was it merely the dawn? The moth that fluttered against your cheek was in the secret, whilst you stood wondering. The leaves, mice, moles, the running water —the burrowing, flying, growing, hasting things— all knew and were communicating with one another, understandingly, conspiratorial, in the hushes of the night. Only man was ignorant, standing perplexed without an alphabet before the book of Time.

The cottage now is full of ghosts. A quiet couple are in occupation of it, and I went to see them the other day. There was the selfsame room where supper used to be laid nearly forty years ago, the very table, and one of the remembered chairs, on the extreme edge of which, as though the proceeding were not quite proper, my cook and caretaker, invited to take a glass of port, would sometimes sit, and in acid tones comment upon the family across the way, the slothfulness of the menservants, the looks and temper of the mistress, the pedigree of the husband, the manners of the children, the quality of the guests, the parsimony that ruled in the domestic economy—all to the detriment of the tenants of the big house and the contrasted glory of those who owned it. Two of the familiar prints—the Coliseum and a pugilist with battered countenance—still hung

upon the wall. And the grate with its fender were the same, standing by which, one autumn evening, Macpherson and Dougal, the gamekeeper, had, with glasses in their hands, pledged the young squire, wishing him long life, good health and a seat in Parliament. The yew tree had lost a branch, but was as green and vigorous as ever. A trifle more worn was the stone threshold over which so many feet had so often passed. The rhododendrons were taller and gaunter, but a shelter still for sleeping choristers. The garden path was mossy as of yore and the walnut tree was shedding its fruit in a corner by the iron fence. Nothing much had altered save the youth who had dwelt there. Gone were the days when his heart had wellnigh broken, but gone too were the sunlit hours, when dreams had been realities and realities had seemed like dreams. Passion, joy, agony, romance, youth's adventure, hope and promise—these had perished long ago, and a chill seemed to hang in the air as one leaf after another detached itself in silence and with the ghost of a sigh fluttered to the ground.

III

THE NIGHTJAR

THE sun was barely down when the moon rose up triumphant in the east. Such stainless weather had not before been witnessed that year—not a cloudlet in the dazzling firmament, nor the faintest breath of a breeze. The work of the day was over, and all was now still but for the bleating of a flock in the pastures and the barking of a dog a long way off. The western horizon was slowly burning itself out through all the stages of incandescence, while the colours darkened and deepened, till nothing remained but a purple bruise and after that a memory only, an aching regret for the glory that had passed away. And meanwhile the great sphere of the moon had risen, monstrous, pallid, balanced on its rim upon the farthest landscape. It had suddenly loomed over the edge of the world and in a few moments had become unveiled, colossal, in the fulness of its pale, reflected light. So swift had been its climb that you could actually see it moving, the whole of it, into view, like the hand of a large clock ticking off the minutes. It was not the moon of poesy, that silvery, sailing witch, casting a spell upon all things earthly, but, as it were, a continent that had swum into your ken. The 'Man in the Moon' was plainly visible, the blurred mouth, the two smudged eyes, the white

bridge of the nose—a bleary ogre, with a round, enormous, earless head; a soulless, cynical, mocking fellow, almost minatory in that first huge disclosure of himself. This must have been what the distant dog was barking at, the cold gaze of this tramp of the night. Yes, it was night at last; the western hemisphere was shrouded in gloom, and the moon had scaled the heavens and had already shrunk to half the size.

Inexhaustible in beauty is the countryside, every fond feature of it, when not defaced by human hands. A torrent, a dancing beck, a wind-swept moor, a green paddock, a forest, a spinney, a mountain, a violet-threaded bank, a lake or reedy pond, a fertile valley or ferny dell, a glade, a hedgerow, a bit of ploughland, a sandy shore, a cliff—each has its poetry, or passion, or evoking memories. Unlike the moon, each has a soul. If you watch and hearken long enough, their personalities and yours will mingle and become one. Your spirit will merge in the music of the running water and be absorbed into herb, rock and shore; and you will forget the human masks that grin around you, the artificial intimacies and pain of living. Nowhere else will you discover a like peace. Alone, cut off from the intercourse of your kind, there you may find it for a little while. Maybe you will listen to the suction of the tide upon a beach or to a high wind in the pines, or gaze across vast plains, where the eye can roam unchecked for leagues, or you may feed upon the comeliness of smooth parks and shaven lawns. Or you may love a saltmarsh best of all, with the wildfowl crying over it, or gorse-strewn commons, or fields of

ripening corn, or gardens full of multi-coloured blossom. Or you may prefer the solitude of the woods and all the secret life that harbours there. For the charm of the woods has rarely been adequately sung. The flashing rivers, the meadows, the waterfalls, the sublime mountain ranges, the rolling downs, the changing heavens, the wheatfields, the unresting sea—have all had their chroniclers and devotees. Every aspect of their loveliness has been limned a thousand times, in verse and prose, and their beauty consecrated in unnumbered hearts. But the quiet recesses of the woods have been comparatively neglected, as though a certain measure of self-advertisement were necessary, even in nature, for due recognition. Yet in the stillness and peace of a wood there may be more magic than in any lake or hill or golden valley.

There is a sandy path in one of the southern counties—a winding, unfrequented track, that alternately climbs and as gently drops for a mile and a half through a fairy scene of English woodland. A few farm cottages, sparsely sprinkled on the outskirts, alone proclaim the settled neighbourhood of man, and all about, in summer, lies a smiling landscape of waving crops and purple ling. It is not, as some woods are, all of a grain and growth, planted by the same hands at about the same time, with a view to profitable felling after a lapse of years, but is as various and uncommercial as the shifting clouds themselves, yet, with all this changefulness and diverse beauty, enfolding an individuality that never alters with its moods. In this short stretch of unpretentious footway, over-arched at intervals by a

group of higher trees transforming it into a roofed and pillared avenue opening into vivid greenery, all that is exquisite in sylvan scenery is spread before the eye—a delicate hazel coppice; then a sweep of heather fringed with broom and yellow tormentil, and dignified by some birch saplings that stand in it ankle-deep, and then a plantation of dark-stemmed chestnut. Farther on a clearing where the charcoal-burners have been, leaving their hut of turf and boughs, and here in the open a few Scotch firs with bloodstained bark, silhouetted against the sky, as well as an ancient beech, blasted, without a leaf. Then a chirruping stream with two giant fungi growing at the edge, pink and lovely and poisonous; and then a piece of marshy ground with its bed of reeds and alder; and on and up under some mighty relics of an ancient grove—vast, black, twisted oaks and sombre, immemorial yews, older and blacker still, among them. After this, in gentle declination and wild sequence, some low brushwood and coarse shrub, a birch covert, a clump of feathery larch, some tall, brittle spruce, impenetrable thickets of thorn and briar, yet another singing rivulet, and forests of curling bracken. And amid all these the jewelled dance of unnumbered insects, the murmur of innumerable bees, the pipe of invisible birds, the tinkle of unseen waters, the scent of honeysuckle, the breath of the wind in the treetops, the deep azure athwart the branches, the shafts of light upon the moss, and the dead leaves of yesteryear.

A summer night, however, is the time to feel the full magic of the wood. Let us slip away there, for the chance may never occur again. Here is the

clearing and the charcoal-burner's hut, with the large patch of brake and heather on one side and some ash underwood on the other. For concealment's sake we'll sit on a log by the pile of faggots which are to be taken later on for winter firing. The dead beech looks gaunt and ghastly as it holds out its withered arms to the moon, and the night air is stirring in the pines. This is the hour of the bat and owl, of moths, hedgehogs, mice, rats, weasels, cockchafers and other sleepless things. A white owl floated past us only a few feet from the ground, as we were coming, soundlessly, like a spectre, disembodied and companionless, and small inky bats flitted round us in the gloom of the yews. But, above all, it is the hour of the nightjar, the goat-sucker, as he is sometimes named, or churn-owl. He it is who, with his consort, is the true magician of this eerie scene. We must be still as though carved out of ebony, or they will see us, for there is a pair of them. One is wheeling over the undergrowth and among the larger trees. Anon he glides into the open and hovers, fluttering noiselessly, over the heather bloom. Surely it can be no bird, but a spectre, some God-forsaken soul, released for a space from its imprisonment to fly among the woods at night. The trees, too, are becoming phantasmal and the ferns are shivering. See! he has suddenly settled upon the path, black, immobile, watchful; but one of us must have stirred, for he is off again in a flash—a glade on the right has swallowed him up. Hark! there is his mate calling from a limb of the stricken beech, crouching along it, motionless, like a piece of the sapless stem itself. Heard you ever a sound like it?

The burbling of a brook is more comparable to the peculiar, penetrative note than any other sound in nature one can think of, yet, unheard, it is incommunicable. There is an occasional change of pitch, a drop to a lower key, but otherwise it is continuous and tireless throughout these peaceful hours of the cloudless summer eve, save only when broken into by a short, eager, guttural cry beyond all human power to interpret.

What can it signify—this mysterious, persistent soliloquy, this echo of purling, bubbling water in the moonlit watches of the night? Whatever secret it may hold, it is the wood's chief spell at such a time and, with the other ghostly influences about you, produces a feeling of enchantment, passionate and indescribable. The hoot of the owl is a weird and melancholy cry. The nightingale pierces the heart with a pang, when, with that haunting, long-drawn plaint, she seems to grieve for lost love and hopes of long ago. Round the bat and the great moths cling the romantic secrecy of all nocturnal things. But beneath the moon, on a still and radiant night, in a clearing of the summer woods, the master-wizard is the nightjar. There is no sorcery like his, as you watch him wheeling and hovering in the shadows and listen to the strangeness of that unearthly call.

IV

THE BLACK HAT

HIGH above the dome of the Central Criminal Court, gazing down upon the busy crowds beneath her, stands, incorruptible, the gold figure of Justice with an upright sword in her dexter hand and a pair of scales in the other. When the sun is shining upon her, she flames like a jewel in the crown of this sombre mass of stone that rears its might above the surrounding roofs and presses its ponderous weight for many yards into the ground below. One of the saddest buildings in all London is this Old Bailey on one of the most tragic of sites, for here stood, before it was demolished, the ancient Newgate Gaol. The walls are so thick that it would be useless to beat upon them for mercy. You would dash your fists against them in vain, for there is no mercy to be hoped for here, only justice, a word carved out of the community's need of protection against that universal, congenital taint, the disease of original sin. For we are all pirates, preying upon one another, on the love, the flesh, or the goods of our neighbours, trying to get something in return for less. That is part of the make-up of all of us, ineradicable, and for the convenience of civilization artificial laws have had to be framed to keep these inborn passions ...ss stem itself.

within definable bounds. You may be as cruel as you please, drunken, lecherous, avaricious, ruthless, bestial, destructive, so long as you observe the letter of the law, which differs, however, the wide world over; for what is legal wrong in England or Japan, may be permissible in Russia, China, Utah, Arabia, or Brazil, though human nature is the same throughout.

One afternoon in May a man was seated in the dock of Mr. Justice Capper's Court. It was a case of murder and the room was packed. The public seats were full to overflowing, as also those of the City Lands, and the remaining accommodation was filled by counsel, male and female, solicitors, clerks, ushers, pressmen, witnesses and various other individuals engaged in the business of the trial, while the jury sat at attention along the two rows of their narrow pen, nine men and three women. The only persons in Court who appeared to be provided with ample elbow-room were the Judge himself in a large arm-chair, and the prisoner in the dock with his warders on either side of him.

The defendant, well educated and of decent stock, had murdered a girl in a fit of jealousy. There was no question of that at all. Even the defence had reluctantly admitted it. What the prisoner's counsel, however, had throughout maintained was that at the time of the killing he had not known what he was doing, or, in other words, had been insane. Gruesome relics had been handed to witnesses in the box for identification: a bloodstained waistcoat, a knife, a slashed pillow, and a feeling of oppression

had settled upon the Court on this warm afternoon in May. It was all so sordid and uninteresting.

As for the prisoner, he knew he was perfectly sane and that all this elaborate defence, arranged for by his family, was mere make-believe. What an ending to his short life of twenty-three years! He watched the judge smelling the posy of garden flowers that his lordship had picked up off the table in front of him. The whole of that morning and most of the afternoon the prisoner had gazed at it, wondering why it was there, ignorant that it was part of an ancient usage for sweetening the Courts against the fœtid odours of old Newgate prison that had then adjoined them, but contrasting in his mind this symbol of lovely springtide with the dreadful reality of his own position. He recognized each of the blossoms in the glowing bunch. Some of them were like those that had grown in the garden of his own home when he was a little boy. How sweetly those wall-flowers must smell! It all came back to him—that sun-kissed border under the eaves of the old house and the scent of the brown flowers that rose in the air and enchanted the senses. How his mother had cherished them! He used to help her water them of an evening when the sun was down and the western sky burnt in glory in those crimeless, happy days. He had believed her to be the most beautiful woman in the world and had worshipped her with a love that was passionate and selfless, and now she was standing in the witness-box telling the Court in a voice that trembled with emotion that he had always been very queer, subject to acute fits of depression,

and had once even tried to take his own life. How could she tell these lies? 'I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' How could those pure lips, that had never spoken a falsehood to him, frame themselves to such a story? The judge had been making notes, but had now once more picked up the bouquet and was looking at it. He seemed to be searching for some particular bloom. Had he found it? Did perchance the days come back to him when he too was a boy—those hours of youth, of innocence and beauty that so quickly fade? And for one fleeting second their eyes had met above the blossom, the eyes of the grave, sad judge, full of dignity and honour, and those of the miserable wretch sitting in the dock. For that brief moment the Old Bailey had melted away and they were alone together in the fields of youth, where there is no looking backward, nor anything irrecoverable, nor stanchless wounds, nor death.

And then a fresh train of thought got started in his brain. The counsel for the prosecution had laid stress upon what he called this act of free volition, and had gone on to talk of a man being his own worst enemy. But that was only a half truth, surely. For he might be born of a half-witted mother, or with the corruption of venereal disease, or aborted and misshapen. Who then could be said to have been his worst enemy? Those might be extreme cases of Fate's indifference to the individual. But could you be sure that a drunkard even, or a felon,

was his own worst enemy in the sense of being arbiter of his passions? Freewill was but a phrase, and after you had hunted it down and probed it as you could, signified no more than that you obeyed your strongest impulse at the moment, whether of lust, or fear, or prudence, or the offspring of habit and training. For, try how you would, you could not disentangle yourself even in this, from the iron law of cause and effect. The root of the difficulty lay rather in another question—If, after all, you were not a creature of free volition, able to choose indifferently between the inward forces that drove you on, why was it that you had the feeling of freedom in so many of your actions? That was the real problem. Although you were not free, you felt that you were. Life was a conflict of emotions. The strife, fierce or gentle, was being waged at nearly every instant of your waking hours. At times the struggle was so desperate—did he not know it?—so evenly balanced, that you almost seemed to be a witness of it, standing by and apart from the duel, while the combatants were at mortal grip. And then one of them prevailed, the tension was relaxed, and a sense of relief took its place. The mightier side had conquered; the opposition had been overcome and, to that extent, the stronger impulse was free to act. For, to that extent, by so much as it overtopped the other, there was nothing up against it. It had disengaged itself and, being unencumbered, could have its own way. It was this which constituted the feeling of freedom of which you were sensible, whenever there had been an inward conflict, small or great. It was

the freedom of disengagement from opposition, not freedom from the arbitrament of natural causes. In short, it was that volume of impulse which was in predominance at any moment, owing to whatever natural causes there might be, that was responsible for the doctrine of freewill, and the further consequence was that, in imaginary actions also, you felt you were free to do this or to do that, since it had always been the accompanying feeling in every real action of your waking life. He knew it, had experienced it all; had felt it when he stood with the knife in his hand. He could go through every step of the process on that fatal night.

If this, then, were a true interpretation of one of the mysteries of creation, a different aspect emerged of human conduct. Sinners would rather be victims. The point of view would have to be shifted from so-called moral to merely natural grounds. The whole of the circumstances that constituted him what he was at any given moment would have to be known, before a man's actions could be fully understood. The composite would have to be analysed; for in it there would be found, if adequate diagnosis were ever possible, a complete code of natural law for every one of his acts of 'free volition'. It was this seeming contradiction between fact and feeling that lay at the centre of all tragedy. For what else was tragedy, but that you felt you were free to shape your destiny and yet found yourself trapped in the meshes of inevitable law? You had power over the impulses of others, but none over your own. You might modify another's inclinations through

the natural laws of cause and effect, but the inclinations of your own breast were beyond your control, since they constituted your very self and were the result of all the accretions of the past and present in natural and unchangeable sequence—just as an arrow could only be deflected by some agency external to itself and outside the forces that first drove it onward.

What, however, did all these people round him understand of such things, or care? What did they signify? They seemed like part of a raree-show, like puppets worked by strings, automata, unreal. A stout, golden-haired woman was sitting in one of the seats of the City Lands, without a hat. She had come, of course, to get a cheap thrill. What could she know of the agony he had suffered, the deep sadness, the failures, the despair of the last few years? What could counsel on either side know about it either, or the jury? The defence in their ignorance were doing their best for him, piling up a tremendous case for insanity. Another witness was now in the box, a specialist in mental disease. One after another the qualifications of this eminent authority, the positions he had filled, the text books he had published, were reeled off by Counsel. Then followed a technical description by the expert of the prisoner's symptoms shortly after the arrest, the look in his eyes, his curious lapses of memory when questioned, the recollection of trivial and oblivion of vital details, the pathological aspect of his previous history, the general impression left on the great doctor of the state of the prisoner's mind. Although

not mad now, he had undoubtedly, in his opinion, been insane at the time of the murder. Oh God! would they never cease talking? Would his counsel never sit down? His chance to die had come at long last, the opportunity to escape from it all, from life's hell, and it was slowly being filched from him. How could they hang him after such testimony? He longed to end it quickly and for good. He was so weary, unutterably weary, and now they would immure him for years, for all the rest of his years, forty perhaps, in an unbearable purgatory. The thought of it made him mad, mad for the first time. His one chance of delivery after so much torment, a quick drop through a trap-door and all the pain over for ever, was now being stolen from him by those who were his friends. How could he make them all believe he had been sane? Even the prosecution were half-hearted and seemed to be wavering over their case, and the jury, he could sense it, had already made up their minds.

But his lordship was now addressing the Court, saying something in a less judicial, more conversational, tone: 'It has always been the custom in this Court for gentlemen to sit with their hats off. I am not looking anywhere in particular, but it has equally been the custom for ladies to keep their hats on.' For one brief moment there was dead silence, and then in a corner of the City Lands a desperate search began for the stout, golden-haired lady's hat. Two men on each side of her hunted in vain. Thinking that someone might be sitting on it, they rose and turned their backs upon the Court, rummaging

amid various paraphernalia, but nothing in the shape of a woman's headgear was to be seen. At length one of them, presumably the husband of the lady, after groping feverishly upon the floor, found the hat at last—a small black one—under the seat, and in a frenzy of haste crammed it on his spouse's head the wrong way round. Counsel, solicitors, witnesses, pressmen, warders, police, clerks, ushers and other officials, as well as the general public, had all turned to gaze upon this unusual interruption of criminal proceedings. A look of unfeigned glee was on every countenance, and an audible titter ran round the Court. Even over the stern visage of his lordship there struggled a smile of irrepressible amusement. And then from the dock came suddenly a shout of laughter. The prisoner was doubled up with merriment and could not stop. He rocked in his chair, while the Court echoed and echoed again with gusts and peals of rollicking mirth. The golden-haired female was sentencing him to death. It was too much for him, for his sense of the ridiculous, this juxtaposition of farce and tragedy, the little black hat perched awry on the yellow hair and the idea of the black cap waiting on the table, too terribly funny, and he held his stomach with the pain of it. There had never been such a scene before. For one transient moment the judge was completely nonplussed, and every learned face as perplexed as his own. Then, in a trice, he regained his self-possession and, looking about him under beetling brows, directed the prisoner to be removed until he had sufficiently recovered to reappear, while he himself

rose from his chair and, bowing to the jury, retired majestically to his own room.

But the case was never resumed that day, for when his lordship made enquiries twenty minutes later it was reported that the prisoner was still laughing.

V

PRISONERS AND CAPTIVES

A YOUNG jackdaw was perched on his shoulder as he played chess one evening in a pool of shadow under the yard wall. It had been touch and go, his being allowed to keep it at all. A fortnight before he had caught it in a hayfield and hidden it in his sleeve. But Chief Officer N. had eyes like a lynx and had noticed his arm crooked a little stiffly as he was marching with the others back to the cells, and had ordered him to fall out. It might have been a piece of metal or some other instrument of possible escape, and he was taken to the bathhouse to be stripped and searched. When, however, the jackdaw was discovered, they all started laughing, and on this wave of good humour he had got away with it and been permitted to keep the bird. He was fond of animals, fonder of them by far than of human beings, and should never forget his passionate rage when that swine X, in for attempted murder, threw the cat in the kitchen oven. If the man hadn't been as strong as a tiger, with a devil's temper, he would have gone for him, and so too would some of the others. He loved this Jackie of his, perhaps it was the only thing now in the world he really did love, unmarried as he was, with no mother or sister; and a rush of protective tenderness welled up in him.

Was there a single other living thing he knew for whom he would go hungry and share a crust with? The bird kept on polishing its beak on the rough cloth of the man's coat, glancing at him sideways with a cocky, half humorous look, as much as to say: 'I'm in a funny sort of place, but the quarters are cosy and the grub good, so I'm quite prepared to humour him a bit till something better turns up.' Opposite these two, man and bird, sat a youngish fellow, with the brow of a poet, but a hard bony face, a blackmailer in for twelve years, and recently under medical treatment, having refused food and lost a lot of weight because a former pal had given up speaking to him when they met of an evening in this same yard. He was no particular favourite of the jackdaw, who would edge away when he put out his hand to touch it. There was a curious superstition about these birds that were occasionally caught and tamed, namely that they were the spirits of old lags, who had spent most of their days inside these walls and had returned to visit their erstwhile habitation. One thing was certain, that the three or four young ones who were living there at the moment had been tamed within a day or two of their capture and seemed so familiar with all their surroundings as to make it difficult to believe that they had not seen them many times before. As they grew older, they little by little flew further afield, and their absences became more protracted, but they generally came back at least once a day to those who had reared them, fluttering at the cell windows in order to be fed. And when one of the inmates had done his time and his room was taken by someone else,

the same bird would nevertheless return over and over again, until it finally found out that its former friend had left for good.

The owner of the jackdaw, who was playing chess, was a burglar by profession, and fully intended to go back to his old way of life in three years' time when he got his freedom. Most of his family were in the same line of business, no less than three of them enjoying His Majesty's hospitality at that very moment for varying periods, a nephew at one place and a brother at another, while his father had died after doing three long stretches at a third; and here he was himself, a chip of the old block, upholding the tradition, respected by his pals outside and all his relations. 'Blacking' he had no sympathy with, despised it as a shabby game, beneath the notice of a decent cracksman, and he would not have associated with the blackmailer who squatted opposite, had they not been the two best chess players in his particular class. It was curious how you could often spot a 'blacker' by his voice. Take this one for example. He would be as smooth as oil for days together, and then all at once would ask you for something, the box for the chessmen or a pencil or piece of paper, and, if you happened not to hear him or delayed handing it over, a tone of menace would creep suddenly into what he was saying, and you would look up quickly and wonder what he was at. But he meant nothing by it; it was just habit, the way he was accustomed to handle anyone, when on the job. He, the burglar, was always very careful how he talked. There was a dirty crowd here ever on the watch to give a man away and so curry

favour to their own advantage. Only last week, the 'Bishop', as he was called, the leader of the London smash-and-grabs, had hidden a piece of wire in a lump of bread that he kept in his cell next to a box of mice. Every two days or so he transferred the wire to a fresh piece, and had bit by bit fashioned it into a skeleton key, waiting for the opportunity to use it—for the 'Bishop' had sworn to make a get-away and was always known to keep his word. Well, one night a couple of officers entered his cell, went straight for the mice's bread and took it off with them, and the next thing he knew was that he had forfeited all the remissions that had been piling up for two years. It was not for want of a caution either, for he had been warned several times about one fellow, an oily Jew in for sodomy, and, though nothing was definitely proved, the 'Bishop' had no shadow of doubt himself, and landed the b——r one with a splinter of wood when no one was looking, rounding a corner of the corridor one day, and cut the blighter's face open, making him bleed like a pig; and the bloody little tale-tit had to say that he had fallen on the splinter by mistake, or worse would have happened to him. It was extraordinary how tame these mice became. The 'Bishop', who had had three of them, for they had now been taken from him, used to tell us that when they heard an officer coming into his cell they would slip like lightning back into their box and not a whisker would be visible; but when he, the 'Bishop' himself, went in, they would be larking about all over the place and would nestle in his pockets, and he could do anything with them he liked.

He, the burglar, had to watch this 'blacker' sitting opposite pretty closely, or he would move a piece when he wasn't looking. That was the worst of this type of convict. The next best chess player, though a long way behind, was a man in for passing worthless cheques, but curiously enough one could get up in the middle of a game to stretch one's legs, and then come back again and be quite sure that none of the pieces had been touched. If it were not for this privilege of association and the games of an evening, he and those like him, who had not lost their remissions or were nearing the end of their sentences, would have long ago eaten their hearts out. Chess, draughts, 'rings', and so forth, certainly passed the time away, for he had never been much of a reader himself. Some of the lags did a lot of reading in their cells, and one or two had a whole shelf full of learned volumes. In fact he could pick out a dozen, each of whom, in his opinion, had more capital stuff in his brain-pan than all the officers put together. One of them was a chap who, since he had come in, had invented a new kind of flood-lighting and intended some day to patent it. Another had designed a refrigerator, cheaper and more effective than any on the market. Then there were a brace of artists—one of them who drew sketches of female nudes as taking as any in the illustrated weeklies; the other, in for indecent assault, who had painted a couple of religious pictures in oils, the 'Last Supper' and the 'Resurrection', which were going to be hung near the altar in the chapel. They also had a musician, in for procuring abortions, who played the organ on Sundays and was composing some music for a hymn.

There was the baker too, who had been in three times and had made the bread off and on for years, of such taste and quality that it would have been highly relished even at the Ritz; in fact, the Medical Officer bought it regularly for his own consumption and that of his family. There were bootmakers, electricians, doctors, tailors, schoolmasters, carpenters, chemists, engineers and craftsmen of every description, second to no one outside in ability; and poets too—one a false pretences man, who wrote verses to a girl and quoted them sometimes, though the chaplain never seemed to think much of them.

The jackdaw kissed his cheek as the man packed the chessmen up and rose from the ground. The bird understood him and knew all about it, for the spirit of an old lag was tenanting that dusky, feathered coat, an old lag who had done several stretches there, but was at peace at last, free to fly away, over the high wall into the woods beyond. Freedom! Ah, what would he not give for that? Life was not so bad here, if you behaved yourself. In fact you could make the place pretty well what you liked within limits, if you got on the right side of the authorities and kept your temper and chaffed them a bit. But to be free! To get outside bars, to smoke a pipe, to buy a drink, to have a bit of adventure once more where there was good money to be got. Freedom! In thirty months it would be his with any luck; for as it got nearer the end of the term it was months, not years, you reckoned in. They could be ticked off more frequently—thirty, twenty-nine, twenty-eight, and so on, till you got down to a couple and then to one. He would miss

the present life in some respects when he got out—Jackie, for instance, and one of the cats, and the games of chess and the jokes of the bath-orderly who kept a tame rat, the feeling also that you needn't worry about your income. But to be free; not to be always looking through bars or at the outline of an unscaleable wall; not to be watched by uniforms all day long; not to be escorted under rifle; not to be locked in your room at a certain hour and have the light switched off at another; to shave when you wanted to; to feel money in your pocket; to be able—to be able to do a hundred things. Yes, he looked forward to that. When he came back again after the spell of liberty, for he knew that some day he would be bound to be brought back, a few of the old lags, in again like himself, would greet him, and he would tame another jackdaw; but freedom after that next stretch would find him an old man, less able to enjoy himself, less active, not so sure of hand and eye, and they would catch him sooner.

The Governor was a fine chap and knew how to handle them. Many a joke he had had with him, threatening to break into his house and steal the plate when he got out, and, by God, he had a good mind to try it, just for the fun. But it was no use taking risks unless there was plenty of money in it. That's where 'Tom Thumb' made a mistake, when he robbed the poor-box and only found a threepenny bit and half a dozen coppers and got pinched as he left the church, and was now doing five years. He himself had broken into four houses one Sunday afternoon, two of them belonging to Methodist Ministers, as he heard afterwards, and in the whole

lot had swept up only about three quid's worth of stuff. Not more than once in his career had he got out of a house with a really huge haul, the contents of a safe which he and a couple of others had taken sixteen hours to break into, but the police had traced it to him, and that was why he was here. The Governor had once asked him if he thought it worth while taking all this risk breaking into houses, coming in for five years, going out again and breaking into a few more, and then being landed for another long stretch. He honestly didn't know what the answer was. Sometimes he thought it was well worth it; it depended on the sort of bloke you were. He himself could not keep away from burglary; it was part of himself, in his blood. His grandfather had been a burglar and had married a burglar's daughter, and his father, two uncles, a couple of brothers and a nephew had been burglars too. It would have been letting down his family to have run straight, as much as to indicate that he was ashamed of them. To find a rich crib, crack it and get away with the spoil, well, he personally could think of nothing better than that, with all his intimates proud and delighted and with money to spend *ad lib* for months together. The Chaplain might talk till the cows came home. Still, the latter was not a bad sort, and it gave you something to do, singing in the choir. It got you out of the cells for a bit and provided an opportunity for a word with the others. Yesterday they had practised the '*Te Deum*', and the singing had gone with a will:

'We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord. Heaven and earth are full of the

Majesty, of Thy glory. O Lord let Thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in Thee.'

The words kept ringing in his ears. Among the twenty-five members of the choir there had been until lately two of the Manchester race gang, but these had now been transferred to practise in the band, as three other members belonged to the Birmingham crowd and there was a holy scrap between them in the chapel one day as they were forming up to march out. That was the worst of these gangs, always at one another's throats if they got a chance. Thank God, his was a family business, handed down from father to son. How that tune stuck in his head, and the words too:

'We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge. We therefore pray Thee help Thy servants: whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood. O Lord, in Thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded.'

Yes, they had sung it with a will—and all this was passing in his mind as he carried the jackdaw back indoors.

But the 'Bishop's' thoughts were totally different. He was seated on his bed with a book in his hand about electrical mechanics, though it was getting almost too dark to read. What a wonderful night it was! He could see the stars gleaming through the panes of the high barred window. Three months ago his preparations for escape were all but completed, when suddenly they had been discovered. He was determined, however, to make another attempt. Patience, watchfulness, instant decision was what was required, and silence too. No more confidences in those boastful moods of his. Only

yesterday, marching back to his cell, he had been suddenly ordered to fall out, taken to the bathhouse and searched to the bone. Someone must have hinted something, but they had found nothing on him. 'Honour among thieves' was all bilge, and the lags all knew it. They would give one another away every time, if it were sufficiently worth their while. It was only fear that held the sneakers back, stark terror of what might befall them one of these days. So nervous were the authorities lest he should make a getaway that his boots had been taken and he had to work in his slippers immediately under the eye of the officer in charge. He wondered who had sent him that almanack last Christmas. It was propped on a shelf opposite the bed, a brightly coloured calendar with the following words in red ink at the top: 'Don't gaze at the stars and fall into the ditch.' It may have been some girl, possibly the one he had thrown over for Nell, whose portrait stood on the bookshelf. She was a stunner for looks, but the photograph scarcely did her justice. Across the bottom of it she had written: 'To my own beloved and heart's darling with undying faith and love.' He was sometimes doubtful, however; lately she had written a good deal less regularly. What a smart girl she was! He had given her a little car of her own after a successful haul in Liverpool, and wondered whether she had got it still. He remembered one night at Oddenino's, when a couple of Scotland Yard men had sat at the next table, and how he had chaffed them and how they had winked at her, and two days later they had got him. Soon she might stop writing altogether, and he would lose her for

good if he didn't get out. But it was power he craved for most, power and money, more even than he wanted her—power first, then wealth, then Nell. He could do what he liked with the fellows he worked with, so long as he got them the goods. They admired, respected and obeyed him; he believed they almost worshipped him. Power! he must wait till the nights were longer and the mists crept up the valleys through the hills, when you could hardly see two yards ahead of you. Power—wealth—he was only thirty-eight, handsome, and very strong. Who were these dullards, made of inferior clay, that they should deprive him of liberty, him a born leader, a man of action, with brains, with genius? It was laughable listening to the unofficial visitor, who came round periodically to see him and advised him to turn to honest ways when he got out, promising to find him a steady job with some decent, understanding fellow, asking him whether he had not now made up his mind to run straight. Christ, what a fool the man was! He, the 'Bishop', working for a decent, understanding fellow, in a steady job! It was all he could do to keep a straight face, though he always assured Mr. —— that he had finally buried the past and meant to settle down and abjure crime for ever, whenever the time came to get his discharge. Abjure power, abjure wealth—think of it! Not he, not if he knew it. They were the only things in the world worth having, with a girl thrown in. Fogs and mists and dark evenings and mornings when men loomed suddenly out of the fume and sounds were muffled, so that the crack of a rifle could scarcely be heard--that was what he was waiting

for. He could imagine the hooter announcing the escape hours after he had got away and all the prison talking about it in undertones, as well as the press and his friends outside. He knew where to get some clothes and cash, for preparations had been made for all contingencies. Nell would be keen on him again, though they would have to keep away from one another till the hunt died down. Patience, courage, ceaseless vigilance, calm but instant decision—all these he had at his command, and, before turning over to sleep, he took one long look at the stars peeping through the bars of the high window and felt somehow that they were in league with him, that they were conspirators too.

The thoughts passing through the mind of No. 37 in Cell 22 of Block D were of quite another order. He was in for fraudulent conversion, was sixty years of age and his hair was snow white. On the top of a bookcase stood a photograph of his wife, a careworn, middle-aged woman, and to the right and left were portraits of two sons, promising looking young fellows, and a fair-haired daughter. There was a mug on the table opposite the bed, and in it were some wild flowers, three poppies, four or five ox-eye daisies and a handful of feathery grass. He had picked them while doing some light work that afternoon with an outside party and, although flowers were not supposed to be permitted in the cells, he had been allowed to take them with him on the usual understanding that he did not 'make a song about it'. He had always loved flowers and believed in a pantheistic sort of way that they had a language of their own which certain chosen people could understand; that, if you were attuned aright, you

could get into communication with them and exchange sensations. There were only about fourteen more months of his sentence to run, but he was a doomed man, in and out of hospital, liable at intervals to slight strokes which at any moment might become more violent and carry him off, and he knew but too well that the chances were heavily loaded against him of ever leaving the place alive. So they allowed him a few wild flowers in his cell from time to time. It was his greatest treat, for he played no games and disliked the society of the other inmates. But to be alone with his flowers when the work and publicity of the day were over; to imagine that he was lying amid a field of them, leagues from any other human soul, with the sound of a stream in the background and the clouds scudding and the breezes swaying the grasses—this was what almost reconciled him to these hours of solitary confinement before he fell asleep. The purity of these simple plants, their detachment from the sordid surroundings, the memories they held, their beauty and delicacy, he sensed it all passionately and was aware that somewhere buried within him was a kernel of answering beauty and purity that responded to theirs, overlaid though it was by so many years of ugly living. He felt he was more akin to them than to anything else on earth, and deep down in his being was conscious of the stirrings of a common ancestry and of a premonition that soon, very soon, he and they would merge and their roots and fibres become identical. Then at last, at long last, would he be at peace, at peace for the first time. What a struggle he had had ever since he was a boy! Peace

he had never known. But to be a flower, a blade of grass!—and he started up, a little dizzy, and took the blossoms and grasses out of the mug and held them against his face and stood thus for a moment, when suddenly in his head there was a furious pulsing and in his ears the sound of a thousand waterfalls, and he felt he was slipping back, back, down, down. And then a mighty silence spread about him, and after that there was oblivion and compassionate unconsciousness, while the cold light of a million stars filled the cell, palely flooding the pitiful photographs, the few books and, finally, the great stillness of death itself. And so in the morning they found him, with the poppies and ox-eye daisies and the feathery grass clutched in his hand, and the Medical Officer told the Governor that it was only what he had expected, for No. 37 had been due for another stroke any time.

Meanwhile the Governor had been engaged in a heart-to-heart talk with Chief Officer N. They sat opposite one another at a table in the office, conversing in earnest tones, and from time to time relapsing into cogitative silence. Neither jackdaws, mice, tame rats, ox-eye daisies nor poppies were engaging their thoughts. The one dominant preoccupation that filled their minds at the moment to the exclusion of all else was the fear lest any of those who had been committed to their custody should one of these days make their escape. Safety—that was the primary problem; how to keep those in who were eternally plotting to get out. It was not, however, so one-sided a problem, the Governor had pointed out, as the Chief Officer might imagine. There was not only an internal but an external

aspect of the question. To keep them in was part of his duty, but to keep others out equally a part also. He was Governor of a fortress which was being watched by sleepless foes outside who, at the slightest sign of any relaxation of vigilance, would dash in to assist an escape. He had potential deserters inside, but also their active accomplices without, and thus a double duty was imposed upon him of keeping an eye on the beleaguers as well as a firm hand upon those within the citadel who would be only too ready to seize an opportunity of going over to the enemy. On the table lay a list of the most desperate characters—the 'Bishop' and ten others. Would he ever be able to hold them? Over and over again he ran through the various safeguards that had been adopted. Had any been left out? It all seemed watertight, yet you never knew. He was worried to-night; had a sort of feeling of suspense, that something was preparing, that the fortress was in danger, this time from outside; that someone, somewhere, was trying to get in to effect a rescue. After saying good night to the Chief Officer, he walked to the front gate and then slowly back across the yard. It was all so still, too still, not a breath, not a sound anywhere, while the stars looked down uncommunicatively from an impenetrable sky. It must be fancy on his part; the responsibility was getting on his mind. How on earth could anyone get in?—and he turned towards his house, resolved to shake off this attack of nerves and go to bed.

But someone *had* got in, though he did not know it, at that very moment—Death, the great accomplice, and No. 37 had made his escape.

VI

EROS

In twenty thousand years or thereabouts, a paltry moment in the life of the planet, London will probably have disappeared, save for a few scraps of heavy masonry. Stray fragments of some of the great museums or other big public edifices may still be discoverable here and there, moss-grown or grey and weather-worn, on which the archæologist will rest, wondering and dreaming about the dead past. They will be mute, pathetic indications that a people, civilized and living largely, once habited there, and from these isolated, fractured bits imagination will try to rebuild the vanished outlines of a vast city with its monuments, mansions and splendid avenues, its mean streets and places of amusement, its churches and offices, its parks and splashing fountains. Organized research may be able to reconstruct a few of the chief features of its disposition, but the breath of its personality will be irrecoverable and even the echo of its voice will have been stilled for ever. Of Piccadilly Circus there will be no trace. An acre or two of gorse may mark the spot where it once was, but, in lieu of the hubbub and the glare of the advertisements, there will be the light of the fixed stars and a nightjar perhaps wheeling in the shadows, and profound peace.

Of all spots in London this Circus seems to be the one where life streams at its fullest with scarcely a halt, just as at Clapham Junction there is barely a minute without a train. The Bank of England looks down upon emptiness for many hours out of the twenty-four, the Law Courts are hushed, the theatres empty, the hotels asleep, London Bridge, Oxford Street and the Strand almost deserted, the bus routes unoccupied, waiting for the morning, the docks and the river silent and desolate; but Piccadilly Circus throughout the day and most of the night, in all seasons and weathers, is never void of an active flux of life and sound. Trafalgar Square may be regarded as the focal centre of Britain as a Power, with her greatest national hero pedestalled above it, scarred, watchful and possessive. By the Marble Arch, in contrast, day in and day out, the populace are sundered into a hundred factions with their jarring aims and conflicting shibboleths. But about Piccadilly Circus there is something that is neither national nor sectional, but universal. The spirit of adventure and of youth is there, that recks not of any constituted authority, or national boundaries, or parties. It drifts in ceaselessly, and out again, from the thoroughfares on every side and from every quarter of the land, while the winged figure that is its symbol stands on tiptoe with his bow, observant of the crowds that throng below him and loosing his invisible shafts from time to time among them.

One evening, about two years ago, I happened to be there, gazing across at Eros, as I sometimes do. Night was fast closing in, and the Circus was ablaze with a myriad of lights. Three tired women, wrapped

in shawls, were still sitting upon the steps of the monument, huddled in front of their flower baskets, but the work of the day was nearly over and hurrying thousands were going home. And, as I looked at the winged boy, methought he drew the string of his bow smartly to his shoulder, and I could see an arrow fitted to it for the first time, and then, a moment later, I felt such a pang in my heart that I knew the dart had pierced my breast. For he shoots at random at the old as well as at the young, and the young are made reckless with the poison of his shafts, but the old merely feel the pain of them and pass on.

The last occasion I stood in the Circus was on boat-race night. How vividly that race comes back to the mind! That afternoon we, to wit, Reggie, aged twelve, Ruth, about eleven, and myself, alas, a trifle more, each of us sporting a light blue rosette, had bought three seats at two shillings a head on a wall overlooking the river, belonging to a small wharf halfway up the course. If you want to know the exact spot, it was a hundred yards upstream from the Cork Training Ship, or a little over two miles from the start, with Hammersmith Bridge well in view. In other words, we were midway along the four-and-a-quarter mile run from Putney to Mortlake. The crowds on the road behind the wharf were almost impenetrable by half past three, the race being timed for four o'clock, but Reggie had urged an early start, and Ruth had backed him up, so we had had no difficulty in getting through and were seated on the narrow, gritty wall, like swallows on a wire, snuffing up the odours of the river mud, and our legs dangling over a barge, for a whole hour

and a half before the race began. The sky was overcast, but the weather fine, and the multitudes that lined either shore are said to have reached a record total. Not less than a couple of million people must have seen the race that afternoon. As far as the eye could reach up and down to the nearest bends, the spectators were packed a score or more deep. Every available boat, bank, wall, balcony, window and roof was occupied to the full. The barge that was moored below us gradually filled to overflowing with children, mothers, aunts, uncles, dogs and fathers of families. An almost vertical ladder ran from the top of the wall to the deck below, and words of encouragement were hurled by a brawny and hilarious fellow in his shirt-sleeves, who appeared to be the host, at the stout female guests who hesitated to take the downward plunge and found themselves in his arms at the bottom, amid the laughter and approval of the general company, before they knew where they were.

What a racket there was above and below! Canoes and skiffs and fussy little motor-boats darted to and fro, across and up and down, on unexplained errands, and consequential, official-looking craft ploughed up-river on more important business. And swarms of sightseers all the while strained and struggled at the water's edge; while overhead the palpitating beat of aeroplanes, some of them with advertisements and outlined like dragon-flies against the sky, added to the excitement of the waiting crowds. Moreover, in addition to all these, a loudspeaker had been installed on a platform to our left, and a running commentary on what [illegible] was transpiring at Putney

was dispensed without pause or reserve by an enthusiastic sportsman stationed there, whose voice at times was almost obliterated by the clamour that was going on around him. The aspect and weight of the crews, the chief personages present, the state of the water and direction of the wind, the toss for position, the photographing, parting cheers and final handgrips, were all described with a becoming seriousness and to the uttermost and minutest detail: 'Cambridge have won the toss and chosen the Surrey side—Oxford have now launched their boat—Cambridge have launched their boat and are paddling down to the start—The Dark Blues are paddling more freely than Cambridge. . . .' A few moments later we were informed that the race was four minutes late in starting; then, in tenser tones: 'Both crews have got away to a fine start.' The voice now grew ever more emotional and rapid in its utterance, and Ruth nearly fell into the barge in stretching across me to hear what was said. 'Both crews rowed nine and a half strokes in the first quarter—They are now dead level!' Reggie wanted to stand on the wall, but I would not let him, for it was a drop of about twelve feet to the deck below. The voice was becoming almost feverish and its tempo had still further increased. 'Cambridge has rowed eighteen and a half full strokes in the second quarter, and Oxford eighteen, but neither boat is gaining—Cambridge is rolling rather badly—They are now past Craven Steps and both are still level—They are now off the Fulham football ground—Oxford is favoured by the bend and has gained a little—Now they are at the Mile Post—Oxford is a quarter of a length to the

good and rowing very evenly—Now they are approaching the Crab Tree and Cambridge is putting on a spurt—The Light Blues are rowing very steadily—Now they are rounding the corner by Harrods, very close together—The water is rather rough and there was nearly a foul just now, but the Cambridge Cox gave way—The pace is very hot and the Dark Blues are beginning to feel it a bit—They are now shooting Hammersmith Bridge and Cambridge is leading. . . .'

The crews, however, were no longer to be mere phantom pictures in this message from the void, but were almost upon us in reality, the attendant aircraft that hovered above them booming ever closer like a cloud of hornets, warning us of their approach, and we ceased to heed, even to hear the words of the announcer. The training ship hid part of the course from view, but at last we caught sight of the crews appearing from behind and shouts began to split the air. What beautiful bladework and long easy swing! With what strength and balance and rhythm they rowed! They were now opposite to us, racing almost neck and neck in the slightly popply water, with not a canvas-length to choose between them, and so close alongside one another that one trembled lest there should be a foul. And immediately in their rear, abreast in stately line, rode half a dozen powerful motor launches, thickly clustered with trainers and coaches past and present, officials, pressmen, experts, relatives, friends, and various supporters of the two boats. A brave show these launches made, carrying such hopes of well-earned victory. There was something triumphant about them as they

breasted the stream in the wake of the crews, churning Father Thames as they swept along. They were part of the supreme effort being made that day by the frail craft ahead of them, sharers in the making of that glorious hour. What months of exacting work there had been, what practice and advice, what changes and disappointments, what fears, sacrifices, plans and calculations before this crucial test! And all the while the planes, great and small, high and low, throbbed and roared and drummed overhead.

The two boats were now passing rapidly from us up Chiswick Reach. So rhythmically in union did the oars of each rise and fall that, seen thus from behind, the crews looked like a couple of scullers only as they crept away. A moment later and they were lost to view on a receding wave of acclamation that grew fainter and fainter, followed on high by their winged escort. In silence, in a kind of reverie after this climax of emotion, Ruth, Reggie and I got off our wall and hastened out before the crowds began to move, and, as we emerged into a by-path to make for the Underground, we could still hear the gabbling voice of the announcer describing, in phrases that stumbled over one another in his breathless excitement, the final incidents of the race.

Yes, the last time I stood in Piccadilly Circus was on boat-race night. What exactly had brought me thither I am unable to say. It may have been a sort of subliminal summons, a hallooing back to many years before. When, however, I got there, I felt myself to be an onlooker merely, an observer of the great throng, not a spiritual part of it. They were all

young men and women, with hardly a greying head amongst them, having drifted in to all appearance aimlessly, drawn by some invisible agency they could not have analysed. The whole place was illumined so brightly that it might have been noonday. Not a shadow was visible anywhere; every recess, outline and surface of the surrounding buildings, every human lineament, was lit up, while the winged figure, light as thistledown, stood in the midst on tiptoe, carefree and unconcerned, ready with his bow. It might have been a trick of light, but I could have sworn that he was pivoting to the right and the left, discharging his arrows in all directions. And, as he did so, tumultuous scenes would occur, now here, now there. Once or twice a café was nearly rushed, and a restaurant opposite was actually stormed and captured, when the police hurried up and drove the intruders out. The huge concourse seemed to be in a ferment, and the excitement was momently increasing. A determined effort was made to overturn a large motor car at the corner of Piccadilly, and several others that were trying to thread their way through the crowd were held up by roysterers, who climbed on the top of them, waving their arms amid vociferous yells. It was an uproarious spectacle, and all the while the shafts, although I could not see them, were, I knew, flying at random from the winged figure—this symbol of romance, adventure, license—maddening the hosts of youth about him, pricking them on they knew not whence and cared not whither.

Ever thicker did the press become, until the Circus was a mass of struggling youth, solid and impassable.

And now, for the first time, above the shouting and discordant cries, you began to catch a different note, higher, more vibrant, more insistent and ominous, the sort of singing sound you sometimes hear issuing from a hive before a swarm takes place, when something primæval and elemental is stirring in the bees. The sporadic outbreaks of rough horse-play had ceased and the vast assemblage seemed to be knit together in a new emotion that was swaying them like a tide, while all eyes were turned upon the winged boy. How airy and irresponsible he looked in contrast to the double cordon of police who stood on guard and hemmed him round. They knew the peril he was in, had seen it coming, for the flying arrows had found their mark and done their work. He was Youth, poised like a god in the midst of his worshippers. He was the embodiment of themselves, their idol and yet their foe. They wanted at the same time to adore and destroy, for youth is ever self-destructive, loving what it kills and killing what it loves, conscious of a blind torment, of the warring marriage of Life and Death. He personified this feeling of mysterious antagonism, of unsolved contradiction, and in a frenzied outburst they surged against the steps. It was all the police could do to hold them in check. Time and again they nearly broke through. Wave after wave beat against the human barrier, spending itself in vain. At length they desisted and fell away. The fever had subsided, the spell was broken, and a kind of exhaustion descended upon them, a listlessness and weariness, a sense of disillusionment and incompletion. Groups began to scatter up the broad alleys, the huge

gathering bit by bit dispersed, and not long afterwards the Circus was left deserted for the first time I had ever seen it so, with the winged figure on tiptoe in the midst of it, his bow in his hand, alone with the night and the stars.

VII

GOOD COUNSEL

EUSTACE MONTGOMERY was a man with graceful manners, an engaging, handsome presence and cultivated tastes. Though he lacked the iron that enters into the composition of Empire-builders and other such heroes, and his intellect could not boast of that imaginative faculty which can round up scattered truths and fuse them into one mighty generalization, he had qualities of heart and head that had won him innumerable friends and, what is so much harder, enabled him to keep them. He was now, however, at his wits' end. The greater part of his capital, to say nothing of his dividends, had gradually crumbled away during the prolonged economic crisis of the last few years, and he had not only himself, but a wife and children to provide for. Moreover, he was sixty odd, and looked it. There seemed to be no opening—literally none. Up to the present he had never seriously tried to make money, never settled down to the absorbing occupation of turning a shilling into eighteen pence. Small hectic flutters he had indulged in from time to time on the Stock Exchange and the racecourse, but as a rule they had proved an extravagance rather than a profit. His income had been a fixed one and his life spent in an atmosphere of security and careless well-being. From year to

year there had been no radical changes in his fortunes, though increases of taxation had necessitated certain irritating economies. But he had always been able to look ahead without too much anxiety, knowing that, short of a financial upheaval, his comforts and those of his family were practically assured. Now, however, the unbelievable cataclysm seemed to have come and he was up against it in challenging proximity for the first time. For the last two years he had been sliding down a slippery gradient at an ever-increasing pace, and at the bottom yawned a dark chasm, the very thought of which sickened and appalled him.

No business firm would dream of taking him at his age. From the world's point of view he was a back-number—finished. For when you reach sixty, you are expected to rest upon your oars in the enjoyment of what you have gathered together, or, if life has been a failure, on the indulgence of those whose affection or regard you happen to possess. The worst of it in his case was that he had married late and his offspring were still dependent upon him. Yes, every profession, leaving out that of crime, seemed to be barred, except the one of mendicancy, and he could hardly sell matches in the street or perambulate the London squares borrowing from his friends. What, at the best, were his assets? He had travelled widely ever since he left school, and was acquainted with endless facets of human life. There was hardly a section of the social strata that he was not more or less familiar with, nor was there any circumstance arising out of everyday concerns which he could not have fitted into the pattern of his large experience.

In fact, he was a man of the world, with few illusions left and a ripe knowledge of human beings of almost every description. If he could only turn this garnered harvest of the mind to some account, exchanging it against the good coin of the realm, the problem of self-preservation might yet be solved. What countless thousands after all would be glad to have a little of his accumulated wisdom! Surely it must be worth something to humanity, especially to those who knew far less of the world and were younger than himself. If it were parcelled out where most needed, in acceptable quantities, at the right moment in the right quarter, it was hard to believe that the recipients would not be only too ready to pay generously for so valuable a service. To get into touch with those to whom he might be useful was the first step in the campaign. You cannot tell from sitting next to someone in a bus, unless you happen to be a thought-reader, what kind of wares he has to sell or what he wants to buy. To make a market, purchaser and vendor must be brought together and know where they can meet. At that moment there might be a dozen people worrying themselves to death in Pimlico, who would be only too willing to pay for a little disinterested, private counsel, but who through lack of a convenient channel would have to go without. So he sent the following advertisement to the personal column of *The Times*:

'Gentleman of sixty, former diplomatist and politician, ripe experience, wide knowledge of men and women of every class, is willing for prepaid fee two pounds give advice to anyone who finds himself or herself in difficulty. Advice given to caller in person

or by letter. Absolute secrecy. Write Box R. 2002. *The Times*, E.C.4.'

Montgomery waited for a week, but there was no response; so he inserted the advertisement again, as well as in two other daily papers. At the end of six weeks he had only been approached by three clients, all of whom preferred to visit him in person rather than put their troubles on paper. It was clearly in his case not a paying proposition. However, his short experience during the period of this novel endeavour may be worth recording, if only to show how thinly the crust of commonplace is spread over society and what poignant drama can be played in the most unlikely quarters.

The first of his callers was a woman of about thirty-five years of age, of the servant class, timid, well formed and not bad-looking. Her dress was plain but neat and her only article of adornment was a small gold wrist-watch that peeped from under her sleeve as she sat on the extreme edge of a chair with her gloved hands folded in her lap. She was, she said, in the household of a gentleman of extremely good position, a bachelor, a public man, whom everyone in the neighbourhood knew and respected. For some little while, nearly six months, he had urged her to marry him. She believed him to be sincerely attached to her, but, being so much above her own station in life, had up till now persistently refused. She was fond of him, had lately helped to nurse him through an illness, and he was pressing her without respite and almost beyond her strength to resist. She had seen the advertisement in the personal column of her employer's paper. What

was she to do? The neighbours suspected nothing, but, if they knew, would be shocked beyond measure. Marriage with him would, she feared, ruin his career, for she was sure that she would never be received among his friends. Yet his health was uncertain and he was deeply unhappy, and they loved one another, and she was distracted by doubt as to what course was for the best. One thing she was resolved upon, that no improper union should ever mar their intercourse. To Montgomery the issue was plain. She was evidently a simple soul. Wedded to this man she would have no mortal chance. For the whole of her married life there would always be the crude disparity of class between her husband and herself. Tongues would never cease unkindly to wag, lips to curl and eyes to harden, and she would ever be subject to the humiliation of knowing that she was hopelessly outside the pale, that the women of her husband's social standing despised and derided her, while he perhaps would be growing cooler after the first inflammatory promptings had died down. As for the husband, he could not possibly take a more imprudent step so far as his career was concerned. His particular profession had not been divulged. But if he were a solicitor, he might lose some of his most valuable clients; if a doctor, a substantial number of his richer patients; if a country squire, the regard and companionship of many of his associates. None but a genius could emerge unscathed from such a mésalliance. This he told her as gently, as kindly, but as firmly as he could, and she wept. In the interests of both of them such an alliance would be fatal to their peace of mind in the small com-

munity in which they appeared to live. An illicit union was, he agreed, out of the question, for in the end it would turn to bitterness and disillusion, and be inevitably found out. His advice, given without any hesitation, was that she should make it plain to her lover that on no account would she agree to either alternative, and, if living in his household became too distressing for her, too difficult, that she should seek another situation and go away. As for the fee, he insisted on returning it. It was not the kind of case, he told her, for which he ever wished or expected to be paid. For a moment she sat in silence, struggling to regain her self-control, and then, putting the notes back in her bag, she rose to go. It was a forlorn and downcast figure that left his doorstep that afternoon. But Montgomery's conscience was clear, for he believed that, if his advice were taken, it would contribute to the ultimate benefit of both parties.

It is evidence of the paramount influence that love and passion exercise in the concerns of men, that of the three matters on which Montgomery's advice was sought, all arose out of romantic and amorous relationships. The second case that was brought him about a week later was graver and more complicated than the first, and even the most experienced might well hesitate to pronounce what advice ought actually to have been given under the unusual circumstances. The visitor was a sad-eyed, careworn lady of about forty, one of those countless faded women who seem never to get their fair due from life, but extract what worldly felicity they can from a round of self-sacrificing activities for those more selfish or

fortunate than themselves. Her voice was depressed, and there was a beaten, bullied look about her which won Montgomery's sympathy at once. She had read his advertisement in the paper and, after much hesitation, had made up her mind to consult him on a very intimate and painful matter. She and her brother lived together and had done so for a long time, for they were both unmarried. Now, however, it seemed that the continuity of this companionship was going to be broken, for he was about to espouse a woman much below him in station, and the sister would have to seek some other home. Still the social incompatibility of such a union was not what she had come to consult him about. If there had been any likelihood of her brother being happy, wedded thus to someone so utterly outside his own rank in life, then, though her personal feelings might have been outraged, she would have done nothing to try to prevent it. There was, however, a much more serious obstacle and the matter was urgent, for, although the affair had up till now hung fire, owing to the woman's genuine disinclination to do anything contrary to her lover's interests, the engagement had finally been agreed upon only the day before, and the marriage might take place at any moment. Yet in some way or another it would have to be prevented, and she would tell him why. Her brother was not normal. A few years ago a horrible event had taken place near where they lived. She could not say anything about it, except that there had been a public outcry and, although all the facts had never been discovered, *she* knew them. The sad truth was, there were times when her brother was

mad. No one suspected it, so far as she was aware, but she had to watch him at certain intervals and could tell from the look in his eyes when these attacks of insanity were coming on. They only lasted a few minutes, and during them she never left his side, enclosing him with her arms and speaking to him as she would to a child. The last time this happened was a year ago when a young woman friend was staying in the house. One night she, the sister, thought she heard a noise in the corridor when they had gone to bed, and, looking out, saw her brother in the dim light approaching the door of the girl's bedroom. He was barefooted and walking on tiptoe, with his head thrust forward. His face was white and his eyes bore the look she knew only too well, while from one hand dangled what seemed like a piece of cord. She went straight towards him and, putting her arms about him, talked to him of their early days when they were children together and played in the fields and gathered cowslips to make into garlands, and dug the primroses up and planted them in their little garden plot. After a moment or two she felt his body relax, while his head sank upon her shoulder, and then with a surge of thankfulness she heard the cord drop upon the floor. His madness had slipped from him like a hideous cloak. But now what was to be done? Some day, if this marriage were allowed, he would kill his wife, she was sure of it. Nothing could save her. Yet, if, on the other hand, these attacks were made known, the authorities would immure him in an asylum and that she could not bear the thought of. For they might ill-treat him, and his mental agony would be

indescribable, since it was only at long intervals that he went out of his mind. She loved him better than anything in the world. What was to be done? How could she warn this woman? And, if she warned her, the breaking off of the engagement, so sudden a shock, might temporarily unhinge him and lead to a terrible disaster.

Montgomery was at a loss what to reply. For some minutes he paced up and down the room, and then sat musing and staring at the floor. At length he made up his mind. Taking her pound notes out of his pocket, he handed them back. She had asked him something he was not qualified to answer. He had never seen the other two persons chiefly concerned and could not conscientiously be responsible for any course that might be taken in so dangerous a dilemma. The best suggestion he could offer was that she should go straight away to the vicar of her parish, take him into her confidence and follow his advice. Such a one would probably be better fitted than any other to formulate a wise procedure, and she would have the comfort, not only of sane counsel, but also of knowing that she had the sympathetic understanding of a God-fearing and disinterested man. As he finished speaking she rose to depart, and tried hard to say something, but her lips were trembling so violently that she was unable to utter a single word. For several days afterwards he went over the details of this interview in his mind. What else ought he to have done? What further use could he have been? The more he pondered, the more was he convinced that he had spoken as he should. So critically near were these unfortunates to

catastrophe, that someone more familiar with the pattern of their daily lives than he could ever be should take the responsibility of the final decision. The inescapable destiny of a Greek tragedy seemed to be theirs.

The third and final client made an appearance about a fortnight later, when Montgomery had nearly abandoned all hopes of further business. This time it was a clergyman, an extremely active-looking man, with a rugged deeply-lined face, a harsh voice and very pale restless eyes. It was the first occasion, so he said, that he had ever been to a consultant in this kind of way. He and another had been much struck by the strangeness of the advertisement at the time, and he had thought over the matter since and decided to give the experiment a trial. Montgomery feared that a question of dogma was going to be broached or some ritualistic dispute which he would have been quite unequal to grapple with. However, it was nothing of the kind. It was concerning his sister that the interview was sought, since the former felt that it was only to a complete stranger he could unburden his confidence, as Montgomery would readily understand when he heard the story.

Some four years ago there had been a dreadful occurrence in his parish. A girl, a member of his own choir, returning from the annual wakes in a neighbouring village, had been waylaid and murdered in a field close to the Vicarage. A footpath leading to where she lived crossed this meadow, and the body was found under a hedge only a few yards from it. She had been strangled. There was naturally a hue and cry all over the district, but the mis-

creant who killed her had got away. His, the parson's, sister had been the only person at the time who could supply the slightest clue. He himself had passed along that very path on his way home the same evening and had seen and heard nothing; but she, who happened to be standing by an open window—it was a bright moonlight night—had heard a muffled cry and caught sight of a thick-set figure, dressed as a labourer, with a cap on his head, running from the hedge in the direction of the fair. This evidence she gave at the inquest, but the perpetrator of the deed had never been found. The case he wished to put to Montgomery was so painful and extraordinary that he hardly knew how to phrase it. His sister, he feared, was out of her mind or, rather, had awful delusions which amounted to insanity and which might, if something were not done, wreck the happiness of several people. At this point he looked up at Montgomery with those pale eyes, and there was a curious flicker in them as though he were not looking at the other but at something else behind and beyond, which produced an uncomfortable feeling in the listener. He was obviously greatly upset and was going through a trying and unprecedented ordeal in opening his heart thus to a stranger. Yes, his sister's mind was undoubtedly unhinged, and she was steadily becoming worse. At times he was scared lest there should be a serious outbreak, perhaps some tragedy in his household. He was engaged to a young woman of whom his sister did not approve, someone below himself in the social scale and whom he hoped to marry in a few weeks' time. It was unbelievable that a sister should blackmail

her own brother, or be prepared to perjure herself and accuse him of a shocking crime of which, it was ridiculous even to have to say it, he was wholly innocent. Yet that was the fact, for, unless he would promise to sever all relations with his fiancée and never see her again, she threatened to divulge to the latter what she knew, and, if that were ineffective, to go to the police and give them certain information. It seemed incredible, but the following was the horrible tale she was going to tell. After hearing that muffled scream four years ago, she had seen her brother emerge from the hedge and had met him in the hall on his return to the house, when she noticed that he was shaking all over and without a hat. On going to the spot she had found the dead body of the girl, and the hat, which she brought back with her, lying near it. What, God help him, was he to do in such a case? He could not bring himself to consult a doctor and get her certified as insane. She was the only relation he had in the world, and to think of her imprisoned in a madhouse was more than he could bear. On the other hand, if she went to the police with this preposterous invention, there would be so terrible a scandal that, although no one would credit the story, the effect upon the parish would be such as he could not calmly contemplate. Three alternatives seemed to be presented to him—and surely such a choice of evils could never have been offered to a man before—firstly to call in medical advice at once and have his sister put under restraint; secondly to let her go to his fiancée and then possibly to the police with her atrocious statement; or, lastly, to break off the engagement with her he was about to

marry. Perhaps he had better make no reservations of confidence—it was his housemaid he was engaged to, a very superior young woman of the highest character.

In a flash it was now revealed to Montgomery who all these people were. He was in the presence of the madman whose sister had visited him three weeks previously, and whose fiancée had been his first client. Those pale, roving orbs, he could see it now, were those of a lunatic, and, though their owner might have prolonged periods of complete sanity, madness—without warning—would overwhelm him in certain circumstances and he would commit sudden deeds of horror that were immediately afterwards wiped from his mind. What advice could he possibly tender? The eyes of the man were upon him, strange and uncontrolled, while forces were at work in that demented make-up which might break loose at any moment. Calmly Montgomery began to talk, soothingly, understandingly, sympathising with the cruel situation that had arisen. He said he had no doubt about the course which ought to be followed, none at all. The sister's insanity should be made a matter of the most tactful and loving handling. The all-important thing was that she should continue to live under her brother's roof, so that he could watch over and care for her, should any further symptoms of the malady recur. As for the threat of the poor afflicted creature to go to the police, the risk of her doing so must be avoided at all costs. The incumbent of a living had his parish to think of, his duty to God, his vows. Such a happening, utterly innocent though he was, would shake the

whole fabric of his ministry and destroy much of the good work he had already done. Gravely did Montgomery counsel him to put aside all thoughts of this marriage and never to see his woman friend again. It would cause pain at first, he feared, acute pain, but ever afterwards would he be thankful that he had acted thus.

With a white countenance and a brief word of thanks, his client rose to go and, as he did so, Montgomery pulled the money he had received out of his pocket and handed it back. Owing to the distressing features of the case, he would, he said, rather not accept a fee, especially from one in holy orders, and only hoped that what he had suggested might be of some use. After all, so he argued to himself, to take money from such a source would almost amount to the compounding of a felony. And so ended the strangest interview he had ever had.

Montgomery had thus made not one farthing, after expending about ten pounds on the various press notices he had paid for, and, in addition, had wasted many hours of precious time waiting for clients who never turned up. This advisory business was clearly not his craft. The waters of human life ran too deep and stormily for amateur experiments of this kind. So once again he sat down with his chin in his hand to ponder over some more remunerative occupation to keep the wolf from the door for a little longer.

A year later he was still looking for a job, and one evening I happened to meet him at the club. He had grown greyer since I saw him last, and was thinner in the face, but he had the same captivating smile

and the boyish, winning manner that had ever been his chief charm. It was then that he told me this strange story—and its odd sequel. The coincidence of the three clients belonging to the same household was, he admitted, almost unbelievable, but had actually happened—and then he laughed. One of his most engaging qualities was that he could always enjoy a joke against himself. Well, he had not only lost money over this particular enterprise, but had been completely off the right tack in offering advice. A short while after the occurrences related above, there had been a case reported of a woman, the sister of a clergyman, who kept house for him, who had suddenly attacked and nearly murdered one of the maids. Fortunately, the brother had rushed in just in time to avert the tragedy. This sister, it appeared, had for several months been suffering from extraordinary delusions, accusing her brother, the vicar, of atrocious imaginary crimes, and had now, owing to this last outbreak, been finally put under restraint. Montgomery, when he read the account, was struck by its remarkable resemblance to certain features of his own late experience and wrote to a friend who lived in the district where the Vicarage was situated, asking him for further details. From the answer received he was now convinced as to the identity of its occupants and realized for the first time that it must after all have been the sister who called upon him, and not the brother, who was mad.

VIII

IN THE TRAP

It was very near the date when she would have to be getting back again to —— and she pictured to herself the great frowning wall and the massive gateway through which she would pass. Her first and second children had been born behind those repellent barriers, but had died soon after birth, and the next one, now on its way, would be the third. The business of this change of address had to be rather carefully timed, for, if the baby was due a fortnight before the sentence expired, you were let off the last fourteen days and so not only had all the wear and tear of the kid coming into the world, but the worry of earning the upkeep of both of you for weeks together. She would never forget her first trial, stared at in the dock by a bunch of gloating sightseers, as though she had been in a Judy-show, the retirement of the jury, the verdict and sentence, and afterwards the abominable shame of the early days in prison, just because she had lifted a pair of stockings from a store. Yet it was done every day under the eyes and noses of the shop staffs, and by educated people, though as a rule it was not considered worth while to prosecute and they merely made you disgorge the goods, warning you not to show your face there again, but making no further fuss about it.

Now and then, however, they decided upon an example, and she happened on that particular occasion to be the one they selected, although it was her first offence. She had been down and out; every decent article she possessed, one after another, had been pawned; her heels had worn through her only pair of stockings and she had had but a cup of coffee all that day. It was destitution that had driven her to it, the harassing fear of starvation or the workhouse. Thieving, on the other hand, was in the blood of some of these other girls; their fingers seemed to itch for other people's property and you couldn't even trust them when they were in gaol. One of them she remembered who, if she could hide anything in her skirt, never failed to do it, though it was always discovered by the woman-officer who searched them as they left the work-room. No, she would never forget her first baby, suckling it behind those bars, a little prisoner who had committed no crime. In the next cell there had been a woman in for keeping a disorderly house, with a child by a black man, and on the other side a blue-eyed slip of a girl, with a miserable shrimp of a thing of unmentionable origin.

They had all but put her in the padded cell that first time, for during those early days she had been desperate and they had kept her under observation. She had lain with her knees drawn up in a corner of the cell for hours together, her face pressed against the wall and floor, dry-eyed and half-demented, refusing to eat or speak, trying to think out some scheme of self-destruction, an escape from the trap in which she had been caught. Afterwards she had calmed

down and, when the child had arrived, been almost happy for a day or two. Then the feeling of despair had returned and they had taken it from her for nearly a month for fear of what she might do to it. But all that was long ago. There had been another since then, born in the same forbidding surroundings of a different father and now dead also. It was the first child, however, that had been the outcome of the real romance of her life, the only fragment of romance she had ever known, yet so short-lived that she sometimes wondered if it had not all been an hallucination, the baseless illusion of a fevered brain; for the man had deserted her and left her stranded without a shilling. The second, as well as this third impending one, had been as you might say, in the ordinary course of business, though both of them unintentional mishaps, for you couldn't always be sure that nothing would come of it, however careful you were. Unfortunately she was subject to fits of asthma at certain periods of the year and this had made it more difficult to earn a living, for men hated to hear you wheeze. Still it was better than v.d., owing to which about thirty women, in for various offences, had been segregated in a corridor by themselves when she had had her second baby, two of them acute and always in hospital. She wondered whether she would see any of the familiar faces when she got the other side of that formidable rampart, and giving the key of her box to a friend who looked after her interests when she was away, threw a shawl round her shoulders and set out thoughtfully for one of the stores.

As woman-officer Mallalieu used to say, many of them were irreclaimable; you could do absolutely nothing with them and it was not worth while attempting to do anything. Callous, irredeemable, it was sheer waste of energy trying to alter their hearts, and sometimes the worst were the most deceptive. 'The Nun', for instance, as she was called, had the sweetest voice in the whole choir and a face like an angel's, but was one of the ugliest cases of procuring they had ever been sent. No. 34, again, answered you, when spoken to, in the most charming manner imaginable and was one of the Chaplain's chief pets, according to him a reformed character, though only a year before she had locked a child in a dark cellar and slowly starved it to death. A strain of rank blood ran through some people. If they were poor and of no account, there was less chance of their escaping punishment and they found themselves sooner or later under lock and key. If they happened to be rich or influential, the disease took its poisonous course, but under a different form, and the law mightn't get them. Out, however, it was bound to come, whatever their circumstances and position in life—nothing could stop it and there was no cure. Sister Lovelace, on the other hand, in the hospital ward, did not take this cynical view. In every human being there was a spark, she believed, of divine fire which could be coaxed into life and fanned into an enduring flame, if only you knew how. She used to watch the prisoners in Chapel and the way in which even some of the recidivists would furtively wipe an eye with the corner of an apron or handkerchief when the parson was preaching, or a particular Psalm or hymn

was being sung. She had noticed it only yesterday during the singing:

'The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort':

. . . .

Cruelly Sister Lovelace felt for them and couldn't get it out of her head that it was they who had been wronged and that the world had been the prime transgressor. She would have liked to throw open the great gates and let them out, all but a few of the worst, and give them their liberty and another chance. Her heart used to ache at the thought of those lonely women in the cells, their spoilt lives, their ruined futures, defenceless, forlorn, desperately sad. They had sinned, but, merciful God, who had not? Had no one sinned against them?—and at times she would weep silently and in secret, unsuspected by the other sisters and officers, and pray that the burden of these unfortunates might somehow be eased. There was only one other person belonging to the prison staff whom she felt would have been able to understand this grief of hers, and that was the Chaplain whom she had often heard preach on Sunday mornings. He could move these poor outcasts to tears or laughter and got nearer to their hearts than anyone else. He would tell them from the pulpit that during that half-hour he was free to speak to them as he liked without any restriction and that they also were free that morning to sing and pray and to listen to him, and he would make some innocent jest or offer

a homely simile, or slip into slang, and you would hear the merriment of the congregation rippling delightedly and unconstrainedly up and down the pews; and then, relapsing into a more serious note, would ask them, when they got back to their 'little rooms' and were alone, to think over what he had said, and would remind them that those hours spent in Chapel were the happiest during their sojourn there, and that some day they would look back upon the singing and the prayers, and the memory would help them in any future trials they might have to face. And eyes would dim with tears and overflow, old eyes that had looked already on many sorrows and could see their journey's end approaching, and young shining ones that still held visions of a full life, of faith recovered and of hope retrieved.

The occupant of Cell 11 had not yet formed any opinion upon the problem of reclaimability. She lay flat on her back, curling her pink toes and stretching a pair of dimpled arms from time to time above her head. All she knew for certain was that the woman lying near her in another bed, was the most intimate and necessary being in her huge and wonderful world. For this world of hers was immense and the incidents of daily life so varied and extraordinary as to be practically incalculable from moment to moment. Her bedroom was so magnificent and full of radiance when she had her meals there with her mother, and yet so warm and cosy when she was tucked up for the night. As for the room where the toys were kept and where she splashed about in the bath and played with the others during the day, it was even more beautiful still and so vast that it

seemed to stretch out almost to infinity. The food, too, was delicious and plentiful and the big people about her kind and gay. For now that she was two years old, she had begun to notice things, that boy, for instance, Bobby they called him, who sometimes used to push her over and take away her toys, but had not been there lately, and a new baby who had only arrived a few days ago. It was the great garden, however, that she liked best of all. She wasn't allowed to pick the flowers, though Sister let her roll on the grass occasionally, for Mother was never with her during these expeditions. In fact, the only thing that somewhat marred her pleasure was that the latter went away all the mornings and afternoons because she said she was so busy. She loved her Mother, how much she couldn't express, with her bright, wavy hair and those long arms that cuddled her, and her soft cheek. But life was certainly complicated, trying to remember all the folk who came in at the door of the big room and spoke to her, two old men who showed her their watches and ladies with coloured dresses who kissed her. She wished Mother would wear a coloured dress, not always the same dull one.

It had all therefore gone according to plan, at least up to a point—the aforementioned trip to the stores with the shawl over her shoulders, the appropriation of certain articles that had not been paid for, arrest by a detective, the pleading guilty, the birth of this child—there had not been a hitch. The only unforeseen part of the programme, which had come as a shock, had been the sentence, far severer than any she had anticipated, the Judge remarking that she

seemed to be developing into an habitual and incorrigible thief and must therefore be given a serious lesson, in the hope that she would take it to heart and turn over a new leaf. So her baby was two years old and there were still several years of the sentence to run. The little gaolbird was now her only possession and occupied all her waking thoughts, releasing such fountains of tenderness and love as she had never suspected could be there. It was her single interest and one remaining hope, her solitary reason now for living, the last link between herself and sanity, the final connecting strand that kept her from despair. Some people had the idea that a prostitute was incapable of feeling, but her own trouble had been that she had always felt too much. They might be a tough crowd, many of them, so far as the men were concerned, but there was hardly one of the women she knew best whose heart wouldn't soften at the sight of a little child or the thought of home; while they often gave to one another when in trouble, sharing sometimes their last half-crown. Speaking for those she was acquainted with, they had their own code of honour, never interfered with a parson, for instance, or a mere youth, nor tried to lead a young girl astray. She clung to her faith in a future life, aware that she would probably die in misery, yet believing that her spirit would survive and that some day she would be at peace.

What the cause of its sudden illness was, the Medical Officer had been unable to say; but one morning it woke in a fever and three days later it was dead.

How terrible, how pitiful had been that awful struggle for breath!—the little nose and throat blocked with phlegm, the heroic patience of the tiny sufferer, its gallant fight, the small white puckered face, and the paroxysms of choking. It was all over now; the cot had been removed from the cell and the woman was alone once more with the rest of her sentence stretching ahead. Last Sunday she had been marched to Chapel, but had taken no part in the singing or the prayers. Seated between one prisoner in for procuring abortions and another for murder, she had kept her head averted from the Governor's balcony in front and, avoiding the space occupied by the figure of the Chaplain, had stared into vacancy. It all meant nothing to her, less than nothing. From henceforth she was a dead woman, dead to feeling, faith, hope and kindness, and, as the service proceeded, had screwed her head still further round and fixed her gaze on a stone in the south wall while the others were repeating the words of the Thanksgiving:

'Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we Thine unworthy servants do give Thee most humble and hearty thanks for all Thy goodness and loving kindness to us and to all men. We bless Thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. . . . And, we beseech Thee, give us that due sense of all Thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful. . . .'

IX

TRANSFUSION

What a medley of contradictory elements we are! Our friends would sometimes scarcely recognize us, nor would our foes. Mrs. A., with her charming daughter, might cease to encourage Mr. X., if she knew all about him and could read his thoughts, while the electors of Boghole would never have chosen Mr. C., had they been fully cognizant of his past. Even Aldermen might be in a very different position, if all their records had been laid bare at the time of their elevation. Councillor Q., the darling of the Cathedral Ward, has had his fun just as much as Henry, the barman of the 'Pig and Whistle', no better and no worse; and as for some of the Justices, their hours of relaxation are at times of such a nature as would surprise the Clerk if he were told about it. If you are Mayor of a County Town, the unruly appetites are so difficult to satisfy without exposure and inevitable public retribution that a well-ordered life in the ordinary sense of the term results as a matter of course. For a bookmaker, on the other hand, or film-star, poet or pugilist the world has different canons of behaviour and thinks nothing of lapses which in other persons, if discovered, would spell the end of their careers. The moral law, therefore, may be excellent discipline for the indivi-

dual himself, but in practice it is not the same law for all and, within limits, the average citizen can break it with impunity. It all depends on your profession. If you are a doctor, avoid unprofessional intimacies with your lady patients; if a political candidate, keep out of the divorce court. It is what people expect of you, or rather what they expect you not to do, that matters. If you start early with a reputation for dissoluteness, you can go on sinning and still hold up your head; but, if you have been awarded a certificate for virtue, woe betide you, should you be discovered falsifying these judgments of your moral worth. And yet, at bottom, men are much the same. There are extremes at each end, but the vast body of humanity is compounded of pretty equal proportions of good and evil. Some sudden fervour in the blood, some seasonal erethism, some insignificant dyspeptic grit, and you would scarcely recognize the prim Robinson or decorous Jones. On the other hand, some crisis in his fortunes, some national emergency, and your whole opinion of that blackguard, Thompson, will undergo a change. In fact, the balance is very nicely adjusted and a little more here or there will at times so alter a man's conduct that even his best friends or worst enemies will hardly know him for the same individual.

In this connection, I shall always remember a story told me by a surgeon. He was in his consulting-room one day, waiting for a client who had made an appointment. At length the front door bell rang, the door of his room opened and the visitor was announced and walked in. He was a big, coarse-

looking fellow, over-dressed, with a low forehead and small, close-set eyes. There was an air of vulgar aggressiveness about him, but with it a certain lack of confidence that suggested the coward and bully. Settling himself in a chair, with two freckled hands resting on his knees, he began with an air of much seriousness to explain the reason of his call. He was forty-five years of age, with a banking business in a small provincial town, a business inherited from his father and grandfather. At one time a highly prosperous concern, during recent years it had considerably declined, until it was now in danger of being ousted by a rival institution that had introduced more modern and attractive methods. The head of this other bank was a Jew who from the humblest beginnings had risen to his present position. The visitor, whom we may call Sweal, was married with a family. His sons and daughters were at the best schools in the locality, learning to fill the social and financial position they had been born to, but which, however, could never be maintained unless some drastic step were taken to pull the business round. His wife, too, belonged to an old county stock and it would almost break her heart, if one of these days she were suddenly compelled to alter for the worse the whole scheme of her existence. He realized that his temperament was unsuited to the building up of a fortune. He was fond of pleasure, of the good things of the earth. He confessed he liked his glass and could not keep away from other snares. The truth was that he loved money for what it could give him, but could not make it. He was addicted to gambling, although he rarely had any luck, and

had got used to champagne every night of the year. He did not want to give all this up, for without it life would lose its savour. But the people where he lived had got their knife into him and were doing their best to ruin his business. There were plenty of men, no better than himself, who were getting on. Unfortunately, he had beaten a dog that had afterwards died and an action had been brought against him, and there had also been some unpleasantness with the local Hunt. He had jumped a fence and landed near a woman who was down and, not thinking at the time, had gone on. Some of his customers had removed their accounts and were trying to persuade others to do the same, and his partner had threatened to withdraw his capital. The Jew was gradually stealing the business, watching for every opportunity to step in, and if it didn't stop, he would soon be a pauper.

The Jews, he continued, were a wonderful people. He had known and watched several of them. They had the temperament and flair for making money. They smelt it out. What they touched turned into gold, or rather they never touched anything unless it contained gold. They worshipped success and despised failure. They lived for material things, for the solid advantages of this world. Upon these they concentrated with an avidity and single-mindedness that nothing could elude. It was in their blood, the blood of the race. Indeed, he was convinced that it was the peculiar composition of this fluid, the quiddity of the corpuscles, that endowed the Jews with this gift of turning what came their way to material account, that enabled them to seize on and make use of every

auxiliary circumstance that could contribute to success. You could see this powerful current nourishing their necks and noses, and giving a distinctive hue to the sclerotic membrane and zygomatic surfaces. The Jewish hæmoglobin attracted, he believed, more oxygen, and the red corpuscles were more active than in a Gentile's body. If he had had the Jewish hæmoglobin in his veins, his business would be going up instead of down, the future of his wife and children assured, and he would be able to enjoy life. After long deliberation, he had made up his mind. He would have an operation performed for which he was prepared to pay any fee that might in reason be demanded. He wanted the blood of a Jew transferred into his venous system, a full-blooded Hebrew of his own age, discreet, healthy, virile, and of indubitable stock. The alien corpuscles, once in his veins, would multiply and supply the deficiency from which he had always suffered.

The surgeon, so he told me, was so astonished at this proposition that, for the moment, he could find nothing to say and, indeed, could hardly keep his countenance. For the idea was preposterous, and this, although he was disgusted by the man's personality, he pointed out to his visitor as politely as he could. He emphasized the futility and fatuity of the scheme, for such an experiment was chemically, physiologically and empirically absurd. But Sweal was not to be moved. He had recently read a treatise which had confirmed him in his resolution, a scientific work translated from the German, which had left no doubt in his mind. He had definitely made his decision and the only question remaining was,

what surgeon should be employed. My friend was in a dilemma. There was nothing dangerous about the operation under the circumstances. Blood transfusion was not an uncommon thing. It was the crazy nature of the whole business that made him hesitate, the useless waste of blood, energy, time and money, the apodeictic certainty that nothing possibly could come of it. If, however, after such plain speaking on his part, this obnoxious gull was still obdurate and bent upon the folly, it was hardly for him, the surgeon, to refuse.

So it was all arranged. A discreet, pure-blooded Jew was selected, in the prime of middle-life, robust and vouched for by reliable sponsors as to his racial antecedents, and the nursing-home notified, where Sweal was to go for the short time necessary for the treatment. On the day fixed for the first instalment of this unprecedented pantomime a pinguid, middle-aged Hebrew rang the bell of the home and was shown upstairs. He looked, so the surgeon said, a typical compound of craft and oil. His tribal and medical credentials were in order and he had produced a certificate from one of the elders of his synagogue attesting to his doctrinal *bona fides* and moral worth. Sweal and the surgeon had, however, one surprise. The former, especially, had anticipated a good deal of difficulty in striking a bargain when it came to the fixing of the exact sum to be paid to the Jew. But this did not arise. The Israelite, the banker had predicted, would place so high an estimate upon the fertilizing blood stream, the incomparable ichor which he had inherited from his Abrahamic forefathers, that he would certainly insist upon so much

an ounce. Indeed, the banker had feared that for every quarter-of-a-pint over the first, the Jew would demand that the price per ounce should be increased in an ever-ascending scale. He had made certain that there would be protracted computations and discussion, and unavoidable surrenders to this Shylock all along the line. In fact, he had even seemed pleased at the idea, for the greater the display of greed and tenacity by the other party, the more value he considered he would be getting for his money. But in these conjectures he had gone astray. He and the surgeon had never met a Jew like this one. Although the latter looked the part to perfection, his psychological make-up seemed to be in total contradiction. He said that he desired to be fair. How much did they think the convenience worth? He hoped from his heart that the transfusion would do the gentleman good. He would gladly have given his blood for next to nothing, had it not been that he was in temporary straits and that his wife was about to be confined. If the transfusion was not satisfactory, he would be only too pleased on a subsequent occasion to let it be repeated free of cost. The banker was taken smartly aback, and so forsooth was the surgeon. Could this, indeed, be the Hebrew of tradition, the real article? And yet there was no doubt about the racial genuineness of this quiet little man. He had been selected from a dozen other candidates and the outward characteristics of his tribe were stamped all over him. So Sweal put his altruistic attitude down to some peculiarly subtle form of Jewish cunning, which he could not at the moment fathom, and suggested an inclusive fee considerably

below the original figure which he had expected he would have to pay.

Everything now being settled, the first blood transference took place, for the treatment was to last for about a fortnight with intervals between the separate decantings. The Gentile's blood gushed forth and the Israelitish stream flowed in to irrigate, as the former hoped, his vascular and faculative processes with the fecundating elements of Hebrew guile. The nurses, who had not been let into the secret, disliked the manners of their patient as much as his conversation and reported that during the time he was in the home he read the financial Press all day long, feeling his nose all over at intervals and hunching his shoulders with hands outspread and palms upwards, as though he were displaying wares at some Eastern bazaar. When the whole transaction was completed, the fees were paid, the parties separated, and, so far as the surgeon knew, none of them ever had met again. News, however, had occasionally trickled through to him from a friend who lived in the same town as the banker. It appeared that Sweal's bank was now on a rather more prosperous footing owing to the activities of a new partner who had come forward and not only put fresh capital into the business, but also his brains. So far as Sweal himself was concerned, he had, in his friend's opinion, become an altered man. In the old days he had been grasping, close-fisted, self-indulgent, incompetent. He had been easily the most detested personality of the whole countryside. There was hardly a fault of which this Christian had not been guilty. In the first place, he had been an unabashed and intolerable snob. Friends

were dropped as soon as they were of no more use and he had fawned upon those who were socially his superiors and who only laughed at him for his pains. He had never spoken to anyone unless for some purpose of his own advantage. He had periodically cut out from the list even of nodding acquaintances all those whom he thought never likely to be able to serve him, and his sole criterion of human value had been that of recognized success. In a man of great attainments such conduct, although repellent, might have been endured by those who either admired or needed him. But, in his case, there had been nothing to recommend this odious and pertinacious cad. He had had no ability and no fortune, nothing to his credit, either moral or material. He had been a drunkard and loose liver, a coward in the hunting field and an insufferable toady, and the community in general had hated and despised him.

What was the position now? The man's character seemed to have undergone a complete metamorphosis, whether owing to the death of his wife or some other cause, he could not say. Although his business reputation stood no higher, for the partial recovery of the bank's fortunes was known to be owing, not to his own capacity, but to that of his partner, the world's opinion of him had changed. He was still incompetent, but now beloved. He was kindly, unselfish, open-handed, slightly unconventional and with friends in every class. The only criticism heard was that he was too simple and unsuspecting: that he allowed himself to be duped by those who were more unscrupulous and greedy than himself, and that his charities, well-intentioned

though they were, were distributed without sufficient regard to individual merits. He was imposed and sponged upon by every wastrel with a good tale, until the state of his personal finances was such that he had had to move into a smaller house on the outskirts of the town. He had grown a beard and his hair was now long and grey, and his clothes were sometimes so shabby that his friends had to remonstrate and appeal. One incident, however, above all others had endeared him to the whole population of the district. At the local theatre, twelve months previously, a fire had broken out. He had been sitting in the dress circle. On the alarm being given, there had been a frenzied stampede to the various exits, but he had kept his seat. The crowd had become so mad with terror that several women and children had been crushed and injured. Sweal had then forced his way into the thick of it, released some of the weaker ones and got them down the stairs and out of the building. He had then dashed back to succour others who were in the upper galleries and in a still worse plight. Over and over again he had emerged carrying a woman or a child. The theatre, in the end, had been completely gutted. He was almost the last to leave, with his clothes torn, his hair singed and both hands severely burnt. This deed would never be forgotten. The local people wanted to give him an ovation, but the next day he was nowhere to be found, for he had left home for an unknown destination and only returned a few weeks later when the excitement had died down.

The surgeon had made no comment at the time and knew not what to think. Had the Jew's blood

indeed wrought a transformation, but done but half its work? Or had the fusion of the two incongruous streams effected some chemical metastasis in the Israelitish fluids, neutralizing the racial genius and giving free play to certain other spiritual tendencies? He had pondered it many times, but never found an answer.

X

THE PORTRAIT

Of all the activities of the *virtuoso* the collecting of pictures gives the most abiding and communicable pleasure. An assemblage of dead moths or fossil bones, a cabinet of ancient coins, a library of first editions, an album of postage stamps—what interest each item in them afforded when it was acquired, what personal reminiscence attaches to every one, what expenditure of time, dexterity, energy or money they may represent, what research and experience, what *flair* and expertism! But it is not always easy to share your delight in them with strangers. They have to be extracted from cases, drawers, shelves, and strong-rooms, to be explained and then returned whence they came. The greater part emerge but rarely from their resting-places and the most valued among them appear to the uninitiated to have little or no significance. It is their owners' hobby, and we smile indulgently while he talks about them and waxes eloquent on the merits of the different specimens. He cannot communicate all the romance that he feels, that he knows to be there, and he puts his treasures back slightly disappointed.

It is different with pictures. The collector cannot keep their romance to himself unless no one enters the house. The beauty of a lovely picture sheds its

glory or its charm upon every beholder and requires no explanation but itself. The whole household can share in it, and every guest. It is a perpetual delight, giving lavishly to all and sundry, and at all times, the best of its qualities, though maybe hiding the secret of its appeal. Its glow, warmth, form, colour, its movement and vitality, naturalness and sublimity, human interest and character, poetry and feeling—there they are upon the wall, inexhaustible, with a different message for each, awakening the imagination and emotions of all who gaze upon it. A collection of beautiful paintings, uncrowded, gathered with anxious thought and care, and perhaps at painful sacrifice, is one of the most covetable possessions a man may have, for the pleasure he can give his friends and other members of the public is beyond reckoning. A picture of fine quality needs no advertisement. Even if it be the only one in a room—then indeed more than ever—it will turn drab surroundings into a focus of interest, and create a shrine for itself out of an environment wholly commonplace and insignificant. Such is the power of beauty to transform the common world!

In this connection a tale told me some years ago occurs to my mind, the story of a man to whom, late in life, romance first came, veiled in the guise . . . But here it is as it was related to me.

He was growing old and grey as a badger. Life was leaving him behind and he felt at times desperately sad. There are days in spring when in the stillness of the woods you can hear the sap mounting in the oak-trees, loosening the bark that throughout the winter has clung to the stems like Nessus's shirt.

It is a sound indescribable, a release, the faintest loosening, that cannot be located, but is about one everywhere. It was at such moments that he realized his age. There was no sap rising in his case to vitalize, to make his skin tingle. He was as arid as a wisp of straw, rootless, discarded, yet full of memories. That was the worst of it. If only he could stem the tide of memory—that pitiless Past that plucked at him with its zest and opportunities lost for ever—the Future would have no meaning for him either. It was Memory that was crucifying him when he thought of the years that stretched ahead.

What a voice that thrush had, piping unseen in a tree near by! He was standing in Kensington Gardens peering into the branches, and the notes fell around him in a shower of ecstasy. He was listening to youth, eternal spring, eternal hope. An intolerable ache was in his heart. The past, the present, and the future fused into a dull pain and a terrible yearning took possession of him to be blotted out, to escape thought and anguish for ever, to extinguish his personality for good and all. Then a calmer mood succeeded, and he sat on a chair watching the young couples, gay, serious, passionate. A little way off a man was sitting by a girl and their lips were pressed together. Life could give nothing better, and he turned away his head. It was sacrilege to spy upon them and he wanted to forget. Out of the past there rose visions of sweet faces that had passed him by, smiles, glances that he had mistaken for more than they meant, and some that had meant more than he guessed; other forms, too, of dead ones who had loved him, prayed for him, watched over him.

Gone for ever. All these ghosts crowded about him, infinitely remote, but haunting, insistent. Evening had now descended with its anodyne of peace; the rumble of the traffic had become fainter, and the mists floated up and veiled the beauty of leaf and stem as he turned home to supper.

And then another mood assailed him. Was it too late even now to snatch from the rags and dregs of life some shred, some vestige of the romance he had always dreamed of? He thought of instances of men he had known who had married or fallen in love. An old school-fellow had mated in middle age, but his wife had died within a few years and the hearts of his children had hardened against him—a sort of Pére Goriot in the making. Another case came to his mind of a man who had married a girl much younger than himself. To all outward appearances she had been a devoted helpmate and in the end had become his nurse, tending him in his last horrible illness, ministering to his wants, perfect in temper, solicitous in his hours of pain. But all the while she had had a secret lover and for years must have prayed and longed to be free. There was hardly a case he could think of that would tempt him to marry at his age, and not one he had ever come across that would lure him into an illicit union. Some of these were disgusting, others merely ridiculous, all of them after a brief spell unsatisfying, turning to ashes in the mouth. Was there anything more repulsive than an old satyr, or more ludicrous than a baldpate, infatuated with a trollop young enough to be his granddaughter, and dancing attendance on her with stiff joints and rheumy eyes?

It was only the ideal of the brain that never faded, that kept its lustre till the throes of death, that remained pure and undefiled—some form conjured up by the spirit, some image of the imagination, fleshless, intangible, but permanent and real. That is why he liked to turn into a Catholic church he knew of and gaze at the saintly figure of a Madonna in a stained-glass window. For she may have represented a real woman, some model of the artist's, but idealized many years ago. She sat enthroned beneath a canopy, holding the divine child and looking into the little chapel, serene and inscrutable. He would stand there, indifferent to dogma and tradition, to Church and creed, but absorbed into this ideal of womanhood, until he was in love with the dream and would kneel down in worship. There he would remain, steeped in the benediction that seemed to flow from the sacred figure, with the glowing colours of the window playing about his head and shoulders, until the chapel gradually darkened with the shadows of the dying day and the face of his beloved was hid from view. How his colleagues in the Department, for he was a civil servant, would laugh among themselves if they knew! Jests would be bandied about, graceless, vulgar ones. So he visited his sanctuary in secret, and slipped away from it, as he hoped, unseen.

One companion, however, he had found of a different and more congenial stamp to whose lodgings he sometimes went, an artist who extracted a slender competence from the illustration of books. On several occasions they had visited the premises of a famous firm of auctioneers and looked at the

pictures exhibited for sale. On the last occasion the lots were being placed in position for the first day's view and they were the only members of the public present. Leaning against a wall, awaiting its turn, was a panel by a Milanese master, in an old frame and in a wonderful state of preservation. It represented the Magdalen, standing alone, with eyes downcast and clasping a box of precious ointment in her hands. The title of the picture was a matter of indifference to him, for our friend knew from the moment he found her that here at last he had met the woman of his soul's desire. Her hair was of red-gold, her face pale, her whole form beautiful. But it was not the physical part of her that drew him out of himself. It was the subtle distinction of her countenance, the sweet, sad seriousness, mingled with infinite tenderness and knowledge, that stirred him to his depths and made him her slave. The Madonna of the chapel had been a goddess, visited but rarely, inaccessible, supernatural, sublime. But here was a woman, a mortal who had lived and suffered, the genuine portrait of some dead Italian, in whose face there dwelt all that he had ever dreamed of when he thought of his ideal, a being superior to Earth, yet of flesh and blood, subject to the laws that govern sex, but remote from pollution, pure, but comprehending, unapproachable by sin. He halted in front of her for a moment or two, made but little comment to his companion, and after a short while found some excuse and departed home.

The following morning he returned and mingled with those who were studying the exhibits. The sale was to take place in four days' time and, the stand-

ard being high, big prices were expected. The Magdalen was hanging in a corner, fortunately not in one of the most conspicuous positions. He strolled slowly down the line, stopping automatically with unseeing eyes opposite several masterpieces until he reached her. But he was afraid to linger too long, lest others might notice his interest and mark her down for their own. There she stood as on the day before, but even more lovely, more arresting, in her appointed place upon the wall for every eye to see. He passed on and came back and yet again, and yet once more, and then left the building in a maze of emotional unrest, unconscious of the traffic that swirled about him. Who was he that he should dream of such a thing—a civil servant with a meagre salary and a private income of insignificant dimensions? The picture might run into thousands. There was hardly any figure it might not reach. It was absurd on the face of it, nay presumptuous, to contemplate its purchase, and he told himself he was a fool and had best keep away. A thousand pounds, even if he could borrow it, would cripple him for years. The next day, however, he went again. There she was still and a couple of men with fleshy noses were examining the picture through magnifying glasses. He heard one of them say—"A school-picture"—and they turned aside. The remark conveyed nothing to him, and the next moment a woman in sables came along with her husband and went into raptures over it. He wandered through the rooms, and returned to the irresistible lure of the beautiful face over and over again. He could not bear that it should be looked at, nor again that it should be

passed over. The following morning saw him there once more. It was the day before the sale and the place was crowded. Three sharp-looking fellows in soft hats, dealers by their mien, were scrutinizing the back of the panel. They then condescended to turn their attention to the front, and one of them actually moistened his finger and rubbed it over a corner of the paint, then shook his head and they moved on. But some of the smarter visitors were enthusiastic in their praise, especially a man in a rich fur coat who gave his opinion in a loud, confident voice. Would he never stop praising it? The whole room would hear, and our friend walked away to the opposite corner and anxiously watched the drama from afar.

He slept but little that night. A fever of excitement kept him awake. The evening before he had been through his accounts. What would the picture go for? It might fetch five thousand. Even if it sold for as little as a thousand pounds, could he possibly afford it? If he borrowed the money, how long would it take him to pay it back and, moreover, would anyone lend it? On the morning of the sale he visited the bank and after a good deal of parleying arranged for a loan for that amount, repayable over a period of two years. He had also made up his mind, if necessary, to take cheaper lodgings. He would cut down his theatres, meals, taxis, tailor's bills, outings, all the unnecessary expenses that he could do without. Would it not be a sufficient reward, even if half-starved, to gaze upon this wondrous face upon his own wall, not sharing its beauty with anyone, a sacred personal possession that he

could treasure all his days and return to after the drab routine of the office to feast upon with adoring eyes?

The moment of the sale was at hand and he stood on the outskirts of the throng. He had purposely given no commission, as he was afraid to trust to another party and intended to bid on his own account. He was almost sick with anxiety. The picture had disappeared from view and was stacked somewhere behind a curtain with the other lots. The number was 93. How slowly the sale proceeded! It seemed to him there was a tension, some kind of expectancy among the crowd, as though they were waiting for the anagnorisis, the climax of a play. The hard voice of the auctioneer kept on announcing the bids. It was sacrilege that his Beloved should be made the object of such a callous and public deal. Lot 90 had been slowly disposed of. Would the strain never be relaxed? He dared not scan the catalogue, for someone might guess his intentions and bid against him. Lot 92 had at length fallen under the hammer and the attendants were placing the Magdalen upon the high easel. How could anyone refrain from bidding for such a face? One dealer got up from his chair and looked at her unconcernedly. Then the auctioneer spoke. "Lot 93—how much for it? Someone start it. Fifty guineas for it to begin with? Forty guineas? Thirty guineas? Twenty guineas for it? Twenty guineas offered for it." By fives, tens and twenties the bidding reached two hundred guineas and then slackened. At this point our friend held up his hand. The auctioneer did not see him at first, but he waved his catalogue

frantically and caught the great man's eye. Bit by bit the price crept up to three hundred guineas and then there was another pause. Our friend had made the last bid and the incredible fact began to dawn upon him that the picture might become his property after all. Then his opponent started again, and the price went to three hundred and fifty. After this there came another lull. His rival then bid once more, and once again our friend nodded his head. No further offers were forthcoming and, trembling from head to foot, he heard the hammer fall and the lot was his. He was in a state bordering on stupor. For just over four hundred pounds he had secured a prize which in normal conditions he and all those who knew his circumstances would have regarded as utterly beyond his reach. It would take him a year to refund the borrowed money and entail sacrifices, that each day would be brought home to him, of comforts and luxuries he had long become used to.

After the sale he wrote out a cheque and carried the panel down the stairs into the street. It was the culminating moment of his life, for he was bearing in his arms the goddess of his dreams for whom he had been prepared to risk so much. That same evening he hung the picture in his sitting-room and stood in front of it for a long spell, gazing at it with ecstasy and drinking in its beauty in a rapture of reverence. He could hardly believe his fortune. The woman of his ideal was his at last and his alone till death parted them. What greater than this had the gods to offer? His love for her was incorruptible, his passion pure. No carnal thought would ever tarnish their union, for he could never ask what she could

never grant. It had been love at first sight that would retain its first wonder and fragrance and all the mystery of a miracle through the coming years.

But, oh, ye pitiless Fates that spin the destinies of mortal man! A week later and our friend was no more. He had caught a chill on that memorable December afternoon, quitting the hot atmosphere of the sale-room for the rigour of the wintry street, and pneumonia had set in. They buried him in a snowstorm. A distant relative, a representative from the Department, and the artist were the only mourners present, and when the earth had been shovelled in, he quietly slipped from the memory of men. As for the picture, it was put up to auction again to pay for his debts and fetched a couple of hundred pounds, passing this time into the hands of a dealer who hung it in his window for customers to see. Alas, poor Romeo!

XI

THE FOG

How little do we know those about us, our public men, our acquaintances, our friends, our relatives, even our nearest and dearest! They largely live their own secret lives and how rarely are we admitted to the inmost chambers of their personality! We should hardly recognize many of them if we saw them there. Vices that we should never suspect, virtues that we should never give them credit for lie in wait, deep in their natures, hidden from observation, until some fecundating circumstance calls them into play. The outwardly devout, the notoriously licentious, what do we really know of them, of the desperate encounters between good and evil that may be tearing their hearts and ruining their peace of mind? The veil is occasionally lifted and the world raises its hands in horror or shouts its approbation, but those who are shocked and those who commend are only too well aware that behind every human mask dreadful conflicts have raged in silence and victories have gone sometimes to one side and sometimes to the other. . . .

It was the worst fog that had darkened London for many years. There is a mist that can be beautiful, in the country, on an afternoon of very early spring, a brume through which you can see the purple

background of the birch, leafless as yet, but budded and full of sap, a mist as imponderable as colour and tenuous as twilight, that does not occlude, but bathes each articulated spray in a transparent haze of delicate mystery. From this you can have every gradation—the wraith-like vapours that steal over water towards evening, the quilt of dense white cloud on field and hedgerow just after sunrise, the completer obscuration of the landscape on damp late autumn days, up to a fog in Fleet Street in November, inspissated, caliginous, unwholesome. But this fog was different. It not only scalded the eyes and flayed the throat, you felt as though your ribs were being held in an invisible but merciless compression that sooner or later would crush the life out of you. It was black, spongy, impenetrable. It was also alive. It moved past you in atramentous masses, brushed against you, stood in your way, seemed to be informed by some motive inimical and sinister for man.

On this particular evening I was engaged to dine with friends at Gatti's restaurant in the Strand. Living as I did in rooms at the Palace end of Buckingham Gate, it meant but a short walk along the Mall and across Trafalgar Square. The route was as familiar to me as my own bedroom, for I had been over it thousands of times and, but for the traffic round Nelson's Monument, could have traversed it blindfold. Had I taken a taxi or gone by the Underground from St. James' Park this tale would never have been written. But it was some distance to the station, such cabs as were about were hooting continuously and had obviously lost their bearings, and so I made up my mind to do the journey on foot.

Emerging from the shelter of the house, I gave another turn to the muffler round my neck, closed the door behind me and stepped down into the murk. Having crossed the road safely and reached the corner of Birdcage Walk, I crossed once more and keeping to the inside edge of the pavement got to the Mall. It was impossible to see a foot in front. The fog not only obliterated landmarks, but muffled sound. On the side-walk a van was stranded and into it I bumped, and even at these close quarters it seemed amorphous and unreal. Figures loomed up suddenly and noiselessly a few inches from one's face out of the smoky blackness and instantly disappeared to be seen no more. The best thing to do was to keep well to the right and hug the park railings all the way to the Horse Guards Parade.

And thus I felt my way with smarting eyeballs through the comparative solitude of the Mall, coughing and choking as the acrid fume found its way past the muffler through the corridors of nose and windpipe into the lungs. Suddenly I heard another cough and someone collided with me heavily. A powerful arm shot out to prevent my falling and a sonorous, educated voice began to apologize. I could dimly see an outline, tall and broad. All else was indistinguishable. In the collision my hand had come in contact with a fur collar. He asked me where exactly we were and I told him. But I had forgotten one thing. In the impact I had been completely twisted round and away from the railings and had now utterly lost my sense of direction. I did not know which way I was facing. That I was no longer fronting Trafalgar Square I was made aware of when I reached out to feel for

the iron posts and my hand encountered nothing but space. He also in the shock of collison had changed position. What were we to do? Not a soul seemed to be in our neighbourhood, although we could hear the distant rumble of traffic. He suggested that we should keep together and we closed in. Gatti's restaurant seemed farther off than ever. The only safe course was to wait patiently until some passer-by might chance our way who could put us both upon our road. We discussed the possibility of my exploring in one direction and he in another until the railings were re-discovered by one of us, when the one who found them could give the other a call. It was too risky, however. My ghost-like companion pointed out that we might wander so far apart that our voices would fail to carry in the fog and we might find ourselves farther from the railings than we were at present. There was also another contingency which I mentioned, namely that if we strayed from the side-walk we might run into a car which would not see us and which we also could not see until too late. An idea then occurred to him. What time was it? I told him that I had left my rooms at twenty-five minutes to eight and must have been walking for a quarter of an hour before I met him, which, including the interval of our conversation, would bring us to about five minutes to eight. Then said he: 'In another five minutes we shall hear the striking of the hour by Big Ben. If we can locate the clock, it will give us some notion of the points of the compass and how to get back to the railings.' I thought at the time how like the booming of Big Ben was the voice of this man. He asked me where I was bound for

and I told him. Shortly afterwards we thought we heard some passing footsteps and we both shouted, but there was no response. Would Big Ben never begin to strike? I remarked that the sound of it might be muffled on such a night as this, and that, if we did not hear it, our safest plan would be to walk on until we came to some buildings and to hug them close till we got to the streets again. At that moment Big Ben began to strike. Our orientation was completely at fault, as I had surmised. We were looking towards the north and Big Ben was well behind us. The strokes, distinct and prolonged, gave us our clue and slowly and gingerly we turned about and crept in the direction of the clock's voice until we once more felt the chill of the railings under our hands. The relief was almost as great as though we had attained sanctuary. He thanked me courteously for my assistance and hoped that I should reach my destination safe and sound. He had not informed me where he himself was going, which I thought strange at the time, seeing that we had stood together for nearly ten minutes discussing the difficulties of the situation. But it seemed selfish not to evince some interest or to try to put him on his way. I therefore told him I knew this part of London well. Where did he want to go? For a moment he was silent. Then a deep sigh escaped him and incredible words reached me through the fog: 'I am going whence there is no return, where there will be peace at last, where wrongs I have done will be forgiven, where there will be no more torture.' A note of agony had crept into this booming, authoritative voice. It was like a voice from the void, for he had

moved a little away and I could no longer see his shape. What could I reply? I made some sympathetic sound and he went on: 'Is it always criminal or cowardly to put an end to one's life? For two years I've lived in hell. A fiend has got hold of me who has no mercy. I am at the end of my tether and nothing is left me but death or dishonour. I am meeting him near here to-night, but I have nothing more to give him.' I asked him why he did not place the matter in the hands of the police. 'I have had a thorn festering in the flesh all my days, a temptation that I could not overcome, devilish, that overmastered me, and he found it out two years ago. I have prayed for such an opportunity. A false step into the river or traffic or under a train on a night like this. Who would suspect? If you knew all you would say I was justified.' I moved forward in the hope of dissuading him, of helping him, I knew not how, but he had already gone, swallowed up soundlessly in the fog.

It made a deep impression upon me, the profound sadness of that voice, the ring of despair in it, and when I reached Gatti's half-an-hour late, I felt out of tune with the surroundings and left early. On the following day the evening paper announced that a man, fairly well-known in Society, with not a very savoury reputation, had been found dead, murdered, halfway along Constitution Hill on the Park side. There had evidently been a desperate struggle and a pair of powerful hands had strangled the life out of him. Scotland Yard opined that one of the bad characters that haunt the Parks at night had taken advantage of the fog with intent to rob, but at the last

moment had for some reason been scared, for a gold watch and money were still on the body. As yet there was no clue, but investigations were being made. Various other people had fallen a prey to this awful night. One man who had been trying to cross Hyde Park had wandered into the Serpentine and been drowned. Another had fallen on the permanent way in the Underground and been cut in half. Several had perished in the traffic. Was my interlocutor in the fog one of them? For some days I could not keep the incident out of my mind. The sadness and wickedness of it preyed upon me—the cruel miscreant on the one side, the broken and tortured victim on the other. The sufferings of the latter had probably now been ended, while his murderer was still at large plying his pitiless trade and measuring out torment to some other soul in agony. Little by little, however, the memory of it all grew fainter as the palimpsest of other happenings overlaid and deadened it.

A year later I was dining at the house of a well-known hostess. Arriving somewhat late owing to a fog, I was hurried up to the lady I was to take in to dinner and joined the procession that was moving downstairs. My partner was comely and agreeable and it was not until halfway through dinner that she turned to talk to her other neighbour. For the moment I was companionless, for the lady on my left was already busily engaged in conversation. I heard what she was saying: 'Why don't they electrify London properly? We pride ourselves on our efficiency and every autumn and winter submit to this asphyxiation by sulphurous smoke, and quite unnecessarily.

Any Government that had the nous to put an end to this nuisance would poll every vote in the Metropolis at the next election. Look at the lives lost in that awful fog last year. I was in it myself. Do you remember it? It was the night of the murder of Alec Lavender. Perhaps you knew him. I've always thought there was something fishy about it.' And then her companion, changing the subject, began to speak, a booming, authoritative voice, the voice that I had last heard on that never-to-be-forgotten evening a year ago. It was unmistakable. The twelve months that had elapsed were suddenly wiped out and I was back in the Mall listening to the invisible speaker laying bare the secret of his tortured life. Every inflection was the same, but for that note of sadness which had so stirred me. The voice was more confident now. There was no doubt about the identity. It was he. So he had not died after all. What then had happened? I leant slightly forward to see what manner of person he was and could scarcely credit the evidence of my eyes. There sat a man tall and broad-shouldered, with a lined, clean-shaven face, square jaw and grim mouth, the well-known features of one of the most celebrated judges in the land. I was dumbfounded, nonplussed. It was impossible and yet it was true. Such a thing did not happen in real life and yet it had happened to me. Not a soul would believe if I related it, and yet it was a fact. My mind was still in a state of confusion when the lady between us turned towards me and someone else occupied his attention. Of what she talked about I have not the slightest recollection, for the shock of the discovery had numbed

every interest but one. When the male guests were eventually left alone I took a seat at the table as far away as possible, as I did not want him to hear my voice. He too might recognize it, although our memorable encounter had taken place so long ago that it was not very likely. But the risk was too dreadful to contemplate and, far off as I was, I opened my lips as little as possible.

What had actually occurred that night? The truth came to me in a flash. I remembered his words: 'I am meeting him near here.' At the end of the table they were discussing crime. My host was saying: 'Judge, there must be a lot of undiscovered crimes, murderers walking in our midst unpunished. There was that Shropshire poisoning case and the Hagley Wood murder and then there was Lavender. I knew him slightly, but never liked him. It looked to me at the time as though it were a case of revenge, someone with a grudge, for nothing was stolen, it seemed so purposeless.' The sad note that I had heard a year ago crept into the Judge's voice, although outwardly he was calm and judicial. He had read the accounts in the Press and thought it was probably some desperado who had been disturbed at the last moment. Again he changed the conversation deftly, but naturally, and soon afterwards we all rose to return to the drawing-room.

I got away early, but, as ill-luck would have it, so did the Judge and we found ourselves in the front hall together, the only two departing guests. We exchanged one or two remarks about the party and I had to help him into his overcoat. It was fur-lined with a fur collar. At the open door he shook me by

the hand and bade me good-night. 'Haven't we met before? I seem to know your face or is it your voice?' I tried very hard to smile, but my lips seemed to be frozen; I tried to speak, but could not; I could not even let go his hand. For the moment my own was paralysed. There we stood gazing at each other palm to palm for a full minute. Then I managed to unlock my fingers. He looked at me hard, as though trying to read my inmost thoughts. My eyes fell before this probing scrutiny, almost guiltily, and when I raised them again he was gone. A billow of smoke rolled in at the doorway and I too went out into the fog.

XII

DIALOGUE

Raymond: Has it ever occurred to you, Peter, that what is called 'getting on' in the world is really an exact science?

Peter: I don't follow you.

Raymond: What I mean is—if you want to get on in life, you must observe certain well-defined rules which could be posted up in suitable public places, cinemas, lavatories, museums, railway stations, etc., and memorized like the ten commandments.

Peter: How many rules would there be?

Raymond: Very few. In fact, now I come to think of it, they could really be boiled down to one.

Petcr: How can it be an exact science, if there is only one rule?

Raymond: I am only speaking loosely. There would be one general rule applicable under many forms. If only we had observed it, Peter, we might both of us have been more important men by now.

Peter: I don't know that I want to be important. I am quite content as I am. If you were less introspective, Raymond, you would be far happier.

Raymond: If I am not as happy as I might be, it is that I have failed to keep my eyes on the butter.

Peter: What on earth are you talking about?

Raymond: It may sound rather crude, but that's the essence of the whole thing, the kernel of success.

Peter: I wish you were not so elliptical. What can butter have to do with it?

Raymond: You are of such a sceptical turn of mind that I always rather hesitate to develop a theory when you're there, even tentatively. However, I have put this particular one to frequent observational tests.

Peter: What an odious phrase!—observational test. Do be simpler, Raymond.

Raymond: You are so particular. First of all let me say that it is a curious example of human perversity that, although self-preservation is the strongest instinct of the race, so many fail to appreciate, as it is sometimes put, which side their bread is buttered.

Peter: I should have thought the sexual instinct was even stronger.

Raymond: The sexual instinct is nothing else than the instinct for the perpetuation of the species through the individual, so that, at bottom, the two are the same. As I was saying, so many fail to appreciate which side their bread is buttered. Is it not time, therefore, that there were a course of instruction for the youthful, a kind of academy, where they could be taught by means of lectures and practical illustration the lesson of self-interest?

Peter: I thought you were going to post it up in the lavatories, etc.

Raymond: Yes, but merely as a reminder. The initial teaching would take place in these proposed centres of training.

Peter: But don't the schools already do it?

Raymond: No, they try to turn out clever boys, and it does not require cleverness, so much as watchfulness and common sense, to grasp and make use of the secret of getting on. It is a bread-and-butter question of everyday concern, not recondite, but rudimentary, calling for no high qualities of mind or character. Its solution makes for security and peace and, once the recognition of the buttered side has grown into a habit, the individual may be held to have mastered his philosophy. He will be assured of a success that talents alone would never obtain for him and of the envy of those whose love of themselves is less enlightened than his own.

Peter: That is hardly what I should call a science.

Raymond: We need not quibble about words. If you prefer it, we will call it a canon of behaviour.

Peter: No, I don't like that either. You mean 'doctrine', don't you?

Raymond: All right, let it be doctrine. It will be found that in this doctrine are comprised many of the chief virtues—Honesty which is the best policy; a modest bearing that makes friends; courtesy that smooths out obstacles; open-handedness that breeds goodwill; generous comment that disarms suspicion; sobriety which is told the secrets of the unsteady; justice that wins confidence, a placid temper that can be silent under aggravation, and patience that can wait.

Peter: And you might add—gratitude that hopes for still further favours.

Raymond: Yes, that is another. Now it is the neg-

lect of self-interest that leads so many to disaster. They find it so hard to bridle a treacherous humour, to endure the foibles of those they despise, to curb their wit at the expense of fools. For it is the small rather than the big things that lure men to their ruin. They forget the unfathomable conceit of many of their kind. Behind a mild address or genial manner there may be throned an all-devouring vanity. A little word may pierce it to the quick and woe betide the poor dependant who in a fractious moment has launched the dart. The wound will fester as long as he remains about the place and, when a sufficient pretext has been fashioned, he will find himself discarded and turned adrift.

Peter: Like Willoughby, who slaved half a lifetime for that bounder, Adams, and was then given the sack for telling him one day what he thought of him. Luckily Willoughby had saved sufficient and was able to carry on.

Raymond: That was just it. The spur of poverty was no longer there in his case. For the hungrier you are, the more likely are you to suit the temper of a patron. An empty belly can stomach any insult. So the man with a competence will climb the ladder of favour less easily than he who cannot afford to let go. The one unpardonable sin in a dependant is to lose his admiration for a patron. He may abuse his trust or half ruin him by a blunder, or commit some other egregious fault, but so long as he cultivates an ever-growing appreciation his place is well-nigh secure. And the reason, Peter, is obvious, for he who is offered such a tribute becomes exalted in his own eyes and, although he may be conscious of not quite

deserving it, there grows within him the flattering doubt whether, after all, his merits have not been underestimated. He therefore becomes in turn a kind of dependant on a keener vision than his own, like the blind who are led by those who can see. And the result of it is that, not only is fondness bred in the patron's heart for this careful student of his character, but the latter gains an ever-increasing influence and can very often guide him just as he will.

Peter: Are you not becoming a trifle over-subtle? Willoughby would never have led Adams by the nose. All he could have hoped for would have been to keep his job.

Raymond: Willoughby was merely an instance you yourself adduced; and he is not such a bad one either. If he had swallowed Adams' brutal rudeness and not disclosed his real opinion of him, he would still have been enjoying what otherwise was a soft job and a well-paid one. And further, if he had had the sense or the training to go one better and grin at the rudeness as though it had been a good joke, he might have ended with an increase in salary and a considerable influence over that nasty cad. That was the very point I was trying to make.

Peter: Willoughby would never have been the man to do that.

Raymond: Under the circumstances, I agree. In other words, his eye was off the butter. He had never properly assimilated the doctrine of self-interest. Yet self-interest is the ultimate clue to many an action and the key that unlocks many a heart. Why is it

then that time after time we so badly serve our own interests?

Peter: Because——

Raymond: One moment—— It is that we mistake something else for them. That is one of the tragedies of life, the cause of missed chances, maimed hopes and wasted strength. To be successful to the end, your eye must never leave the buttered side, however large your assets or fortunate you heretofore have been. Is it not well, therefore, while we are still callow, to study this all-important science, or, if you prefer it, doctrine, and make ourselves its masters before we run our race? What a load of regret such a training might save us, what downfalls avert, what comfortable paths of travel reveal in place of desert, rocks and bitter cold! What is the use of Greek without it, or logic, or astronomy, or any other learning? You may read the ancient classics as easily as your morning paper; the higher mathematics may seem like a child's primer; but if you have failed to learn the lesson of self-interest, you are as likely as not to die neglected or a pauper. All the erudition of the schools will not teach it to you. It must be a task by itself, gradually to be apprehended and absorbed into the system, and he who compasses it will gather in a harvest while cleverer men are looking on.

Peter: You have been wonderfully earnest, Raymond, and even eloquent; but I am still unconvinced. Nothing posted up in a lavatory would be likely to make me much happier than I am.

Raymond: I am sorry I mentioned the word lavatory at all and ought to have known you would

fasten upon it. Dismiss, if you can, the lavatory altogether from your mind and look at the question broadly and impartially.

Peter: Pass the wine, old man, will you? Have you ever realized, Raymond, that space is bent, curved back upon itself, and not limitless therefore, as we used to think, and that we are living in a four-dimensional *continuum*, made up of three parts space and one of time?

Raymond: I don't pretend to understand it, but that is Einstein's theory, isn't it?

Peter: Partly—and you have ever thought about the nature of the Universe?

Raymond: A great disappointment mostly.

Peter: Yes, I daresay, but it may be likened roughly to the film of a soap-bubble, the interior of the bubble and what is outside being left for the purpose out of account. This film, so to speak, is the Universe, in other words, Space, which in some way or another has got rucked or crumpled here and there. And the scientists go even further—this crumpling, or what we know as 'matter', is now held to be nothing more than arrested waves of radiation, held-up, comparatively inactive, as it were, for the time being; whereas light, electricity, cosmic rays, etc., are radiation in full play. Again, we, that is, organic life on Earth, are merely an accident outside the main stream and purpose of the Universe. We appear to have come into existence through a mishap to the Sun and, having been torn out of the side of the latter by some other luminary which got too close, are now held by gravitation within a comparatively narrow belt which happens for the moment to be

temperate enough to allow of life. But this life-sufficing zone will in time inevitably shift its position as the sun grows cooler, until Earth will find itself outside the temperate belt and all life will become extinct. I don't know whether you are following me, Raymond, but what I am now telling you is the accepted doctrine of some of the acutest of our modern thinkers. Moreover, the Universe, they contend, is not the creation of a great philanthropist, or moralist, or physicist, but of a supreme mathematical intellect, and in fact resolves itself ultimately into a pure mathematical problem.

Raymond: I fear this is quite beyond me and anyway has no relation whatever to the practical affairs of everyday life.

Peter: Wait a moment. This doctrine has its practical uses as well as its charm. If these learned gentlemen are right, as they may well be, nothing really matters; and, if nothing matters, why worry, Raymond? Take things as they come. So far as our Earth is concerned, compared with the rest of the visible Universe, it has been likened by the astronomers to a single minute grain of sand among all the other grains upon all the shores of the world. They also tell us that the light from the farthest cluster of discovered stars takes a hundred and fifty million years to reach us, and recollect, please, that the light from our sun, which is ninety millions of miles away, takes only nine minutes.

Raymond: Eight minutes, isn't it?

Peter: Well, that is more impressive still. When I think of the insignificance of our planet and of all of us amidst this inconceivable vastness, it makes me

very happy. I feel inclined to sing. The League of Nations, the Oval, New York, the Court Guide, the Soviet Republics, the Royal Academy, Parliaments and Prisons, the Pulpit and the Press, the Oxford Dictionary, the British Empire, are seen in better perspective. We two sitting over our glass of wine here are just as significant, relatively, as any of them. We shall disappear in a jiffy, but so too in a jiffy will they, and not a trace nor a memory be left behind. All their little importances, together with the whole history of mankind from the beginning, will have occupied but a paltry accidental moment in the huge epochs of the galaxies. Do not therefore, be too introspective, Raymond, nor too calculating. You may suffer from an inferiority complex when you ruminate about the stars, but when you think of your own kind, Secretaries of State, ambassadors, Royal Academicians, leaders of fashion, aldermen, bishops, viscounts, film-stars, critics, editors, plutocrats, and big-wigs of every complexion, with their consequential airs, well, there is no cause for personal despondency. They are all so small, so hideously small as they strut around wondering which side their bread is buttered.

Raymond: You're a rum card, Peter.

Peter: Pass the wine, old man. It is imprisoned sunlight. Some far-off summer endowed these juices with its perfume and magic, and the hillside of a purple land gave them its strength and beauty of colour. The Gods would like to drink this wine, Raymond, and, as we sip it, do we not feel the equal of the gods themselves? There is nothing better Earth can give her children than a glorious red

wine. There is passion in it, yet content, gilded dreams and gorgeous phantasies, eloquence, mirth, peace, goodwill. Waste not one precious drop, for it belongs to the spirit of man rather than his body, to the immaterial essences of the soul.

(They both drink.)

XIII

TITLES

THERE was hardly a branch of the art of electioneering in which Sir Augustus Plaster, Knight, M.P., was not an adept. For thirteen years he had represented the Pugley division and was now in middle life. How hard he had worked for that knighthood! At one time he thought he would never get it, in spite of all the dinners to influential colleagues, of the tedious committees on which he had sat, the subscriptions to Party funds and constant attendance in the House. And then at last he had found himself in the Honours' List. How delighted all his supporters had been! They had always known that Plaster would make good, and for some time now he had been 'Sir Augustus'.

But what was a knighthood after all? You could not transmit it. His son's wife would only be Mrs. Plaster, and his son, and that dear little golden-haired grandson, just 'Plaster' and nothing more. There was all the difference in the world between 'Plaster' and 'Sir Augustus'. The alderman's bow would once more shrink to a nod, and the rank and file become familiar as of old and treat the family as equals. A baronetcy however was a costly affair, if money were your only asset. He used to lie awake at night musing, musing. How was he ever to get

that baronetcy? Pay for it he did not feel inclined to, yet there were a number of baronets giving themselves airs with no better credentials than his own—Sir Nicholas Mullet, Bart., M.P., an oily humbug if ever there was one; that bounder, too, Sir Seamy Sharpe, and that Prince of lickspittles, Wallington-Huffy. Why should they be baronets and he only a knight? They might be richer, but hadn't done a fraction of his own work for the Party. If the truth be told, he was not good at climbing and pride perhaps was at the bottom of it. But, if the family tree was not to suffer, he must sink his own feelings before it was too late.

Up to the present he had done his utmost to please. The whole of his energies had been concentrated on the effort to ingratiate himself with the party managers, to flatter the authority of those in power. It was evident that something more was required, or, rather, something different. A feeling had long been germinating in his breast that the party machine despised him, regarded him as jobbed, paid off, and had no intention of re-opening the account. A fresh tack must therefore be pursued, so unlike the former that it would almost appear as though a new member had stepped into his shoes and was starting upon a career, if not of self-sacrifice, at least of promise. From having been a flunkey he would now be a thorn, aye, a scorpion, an ever-watchful sentinel, ceaselessly on the alert for any invasion of the Parliamentary rights of the private member. There were certain to be occasions when this vigilance would be rewarded; for every Executive loves power. A private member may have been

as wild as a snipe, but once he reaches the Government bench, usually settles down upon it as tamely as an ornamental duck, and any assertion of the privileges of those behind him is thenceforward regarded not only as unreasonable, but as a fall from grace. The rights of the back-bencher are a bugbear to every Administration and Plaster had been long enough in the House to be fully aware of it.

Though without real ability or eloquence, he had been dowered with a good presence and a rich, resonant voice. There was also something mulish about him, and two of the new baronetcies had profoundly stirred his bile. By dint of continual attendance to his Parliamentary duties he had acquired moreover an intimate knowledge of procedure and it was here that he believed he could make himself felt by those who persisted in ignoring his claims. In his study at home he pondered deeply, making a list of the opportunities for throwing grit into the legislative machine and generally hampering business. For if there were one thing that fluttered the Whips' dovecote more than another and worried every departmental Minister in turn, it was any delay in the programme of the Government and consequent interference in the time-table, which at all costs must be adhered to if the House was to rise by a certain date. It was part of the sacred ritual which lay in the Whips' room and whose texts were known by heart, for delays opened up possibilities of uncharted trouble, and a storm might blow up at any time if discussion of a question were too prolonged. Now it was in the matter of financial procedure that our Knight felt most at home and

which, all things considered, offered the best hope of mischief and therefore of recognition. From the first day of the new session he accordingly set about with a will. No public money, he conjured the House, should be granted without full discussion and a guarantee that proper value would accrue to the sweating taxpayer who had to find it. In no sense was it a party issue. He was a loyal party man, as they all knew, and ever had been. This, however, was a question not of party, but of conscience and pocket, and the two, as everyone is aware (though he did not labour it), are sometimes so closely interwoven that it is difficult to disentangle the one from the other. The House of Commons, he maintained on another occasion, were trustees for the taxpayers. The expenditure asked for might be required; he was not gainsaying it. All he pleaded for was that adequate particulars should be vouchsafed, so that they might rest assured that full return was being given for the amount of the supply. Although a trifle ponderous, he was courtesy itself and, when Ministers were inclined to be irritable, would assume an injured tone and, turning to his own benches, appeal for their support; and so serious was he, so obviously in earnest, that one member after another would rise in his place and take up the cudgels in the common cause. His acquaintances were now heard to say—'Plaster's got a bit of a bee in his bonnet about this expenditure, but, you know, he's right in the main. There has been a scandalous amount of waste lately.' As for the Whips, they got gradually to loathe him, avoiding his eye in the lobby, and in the privacy of their own

room discussing his conduct with poisoned breath. 'That bloody swine, Plaster, has upset the time-table'—or, 'He had better look out or there will be trouble in his constituency'—or, 'It's obvious why he is doing all this'; for they knew perfectly well the game he was really playing.

And then suddenly the opportunity came. He was studying the Finance Bill with a view to obstruction, when in the middle of one of the later clauses, he received, as he described it afterwards, the surprise of his Parliamentary career. For the uninitiated it should here be explained that the Finance Bill of the year is founded upon certain Budget resolutions. When these have been passed, the bill can be proceeded with; but, and this is the lynch-pin of the procedure, the bill must on no account contain more taxation than is comprised in the resolutions that served as its basis. Now, embedded in one of the sections, at first sight a harmless interjection, the kind of trumpery charge that a Sergeant-at-Arms could have defrayed from his own pocket, lay hidden a parenthesis which gravely contravened this inviolable law of the Medes and Persians. What was to be done? There was only one honest remedy. The Finance Bill would have to be withdrawn and either reintroduced without those peccant lines, or a special resolution passed authorizing the new imposition and the same bill re-presented to the House. He could hardly believe his luck, but there it was. Many hours had been spent on the second reading, all now waste of time. The following morning he sent a note to the Speaker that at the end of questions he would raise the point of order, and summarized

the considerations he proposed to submit. When the moment arrived, up he got in a crowded House and in studiously moderate language, appearing to hesitate a little at his own temerity, put the point to Mr. Speaker that the Finance Bill was out of order. In his submission, it would have to be withdrawn and the offending Clause be made the subject of a new Resolution. With breathless interest the members awaited the reply of the Chair and a look of consternation spread over the countenances of all the occupants of the Treasury bench. Mr. Speaker rose majestically. He had had an opportunity of considering the matter. It was of course a well-known part of their procedure that no financial impost could be included in a Finance Bill that had not already been agreed to by resolution of the House. In his opinion this rule had not been observed so far as the particular clause was concerned, and the upshot was that, in spite of a previous somewhat doubtful decision in a case less patent than the present one, the Bill, over which so much discussion had taken place, would have to be withdrawn and the proper steps taken to regularize the situation. The Chancellor of the Exchequer struggled hard to find a flaw in the argument and so did the Prime Minister, but without avail. As members entered the Lobby from outside they were met with the query—'Have you heard the news?—they have had to withdraw the Finance Bill—Plaster got it ruled out of order.' 'Plaster' could be heard in every corner of the building—in the library and lobbies, in the newspaper, smoking and tea rooms, on the Terrace and in the Chamber itself. The Evening

Press was full of it—'Government Fiasco—The Finance Bill withdrawn—Sir Augustus Plaster's discovery'—in huge headlines. Never had there been such an anti-climax in the memory of the oldest member. It was now—'Gussie Plaster'.—'Gussie Plaster has put them in a devil of a fix—Gussie Plaster was quite right to raise the question—How on earth could the Treasury have made such a blunder? Gussie Plaster can't understand it.' A change also had come over the demeanour of the Whips. One of them familiarly called him 'Gussie', while another, with rather strained cordiality, even slapped him on the shoulder and with a wry smile complimented him on his successful coup. The baronetcy was merely a matter of time and he knew it. For the next few weeks he discreetly discontinued his activities in finance, but since he was now regarded as a man to be reconciled, intimations were conveyed in the proper quarter and received in the proper spirit, and in January of the following year his name was among the honours for political services! He had won the trick and was a Baronet at last.

There is a well-known etching of William Blake's, depicting a figure beneath a star-lit Heaven trying to climb up a ladder from the Earth to the Moon, while underneath are the words—'I want! I want!' It is meant to illustrate humanity's yearning for the unattainable, that universal unrest of the spirit, hankering for an ideal which can never be realized. Sir Augustus Plaster, Bart., M.P., was no exception to the general rule. In a couple of years from the publication of the honours' list, recorded above, his

baronetcy had already begun to stale, nay almost to stink, and if you could have listened at times to the ejaculations of his soul, you would have heard the cry—'I want! I want!' The fly in the ointment was this—a baronetcy had been conferred at the same moment on a certain Albert Blaster, M.P., who by a curious coincidence, had not only been endowed with a very similar name, but sat next but one to him on a bench below the gangway. Of all the members he despised and detested this one the most. In the first place, letters intended for Blaster were always being handed in error to himself, and *vice versa*, until he was hardly sure of his own identity. Moreover, Blaster's reputation was none too savoury. Indeed, at one time, so it was said, he had been nearly involved in a prosecution owing to some transaction never quite unearthed. Lastly, he was inordinately rich and, having some years before purchased an estate not far from our friend's, had made himself so insufferable by intrusive vulgarities, that their respective wives were scarcely on speaking terms. It was therefore a rankling mortification to have been bracketed in the honours' list with this egregious cad; a daily tribulation to be addressed by mistake as 'Blaster', and to hear the other being greeted with his own patronymic when passing through the lobbies.

To avoid the near neighbourhood of this fellow's presence, he had exchanged places with a friend, who preferred a corner seat, and had planted himself immediately behind the Ministerial bench. For the baronetcy had become an incubus instead of a distinction. Looking back upon it all in cold blood,

it now seemed to him little less than an insult that one should have been conferred upon Blaster in the same breath that had announced his own. It had taken all the gilt off the honour, and the title had begun to get upon his nerves. An unmannerly wag had asked him only the other day in the tearoom how 'Box' was, and when he enquired what he meant, the answer had been—'Why, old man, don't you see—Box and Cox—Blaster and Plaster—ha! ha!' It was intolerable and he had turned away in disgust. If Blaster was worthy of a baronetcy, surely *he* deserved something more. If Sir Albert Blaster, Bart., M.P., had only received his due, why should not a 'Lord Pugley of Pugley' have received his? It was a tormenting thought. Once again he could not sleep properly and lay awake at night suffering the pangs of unappeased ambition. At length a notion swam into his brain, dropped anchor and then swelled and swelled till it completely filled his being. Titular advancement, such as he had in mind, depended more than any other, he believed, on the personal favour of the Premier of the day. If only he could make a real friend of the Prime Minister, convince him of the genuineness of his appreciation, proffer on occasion a heartfelt word of warning or advice, be a sort of watchdog or *alter ego*—so grateful would the object of this worship be, that, assuredly, the wish of his heart would one day be granted.

Here was an opportunity, provided for the very purpose, so it seemed. For he was now within corporeal reach of the great man and could count almost every hair on the back of his poll. But it would not do to go too fast. He must be genial,

observant, and take his chance. That resonant voice of his now stood him in good stead. The speeches of the Leader began to be punctuated with echoing 'hear, hears', irrespective of the quality of the oration or the circumstances of the particular debate. For our friend directed his attention not so much to the arguments employed, as to the suitable intervals between the salvos, so as to secure that each intervening, cheerless hiatus should not be too prolonged. Thus banalities were applauded with gusto and colourless passages wrenched from their setting for the admiration and commendation of the House. It all depended upon the termination of the allotted span when a cheer was due. At the end of the Leader's speeches he would also lean his large body forward, congratulating him on the effort, or reminding him that he had overlooked a point or misquoted something, or that his voice was weaker than usual and had failed to reach many of those who sat around him—and all this with so manifest a desire to help, that even the private secretaries were at a loss what to think. Indeed, it was an exceedingly difficult situation to deal with, for Sir Augustus Plaster, Bart., M.P., was by this time an official of some consequence in the Party's organizations, and not only subscribed to its funds, but had the ear of several important members of the Front Bench. But our friend's activities did not halt at debate. He waylaid the Leader in the division lobbies, dogging his footsteps like a faithful St. Bernard and monopolizing his attention to the fury of other aspirants and the suffocating fatigue of the Minister himself. In the dining-room too, in passing

the Ministerial table in or out at dinner, he would bend over the poor man, as the latter was hurriedly chewing a chop, and whisper a long word of encouragement, counsel or information. In the smoking-room it was the same. Wherever the Leader happened to be, there would be Sir Augustus Plaster, hovering round him with a sort of proprietary air, impervious to snubs, unconscious of the torture of these perpetual attentions.

Then came a day when an important speech had to be delivered by the Premier. Our friend was in his accustomed place, alert as usual. Now, no politician, sir, whatever his calibre, can always maintain the same average of style. Just as he will sometimes soar above it to the stars, so too at times will he drop below. The speech on this occasion was a disappointment, recognized as such, a desperate swimming in glue, a compound of dreary commonplace and strengthless appeal. The man was obviously tired out and ought to have been in bed. But the cheering just behind him never faltered, although it proceeded from only one throat. At intervals of a minute or so volleys of it resounded through the Chamber, mechanically like a Gatling-gun, accentuating the poverty of the rhetorical performance and bringing ridicule upon the victim. Later on in the evening the Chief Whip was closeted in conference with the Leader. The latter looked worn and harassed and the former was listening with bent head. 'My God! I can't stand this fellow any longer. We must get rid of him. Either he goes or I. Deal with him somehow, but stop this tomfoolery. You may do what you like about it.' The following day,

to his gratification, Plaster was invited to the room of the Patronage Secretary for a private talk. The charm of this official at his best had to be experienced to be believed. For a long time, it appeared, the Leader had felt that our Baronet's services ought to be rewarded. His loyalty to the Party, his services in the House, his local support at Pugley, were appreciated to their full. In short—but it was very private, and perhaps he would be good enough not to mention it to anyone but Lady Plaster—the Prime Minister proposed to recommend his name to the King for a peerage in the coming list. There was only one small hint he would venture. In order to avoid any suspicion of favouritism, for people were apt to be very ungenerous, he suggested that it might be as well if Plaster kept away from the Leader as much as possible during the next few months and did not appear to be too intimate with him, and this applied also to his attitude in the Chamber itself. A little elaborate indifference would be all to the good. Our friend's feelings may be imagined. The personal touch had done the trick, as he knew it would, and, readily giving the assurances asked for, he left the Whip's presence on a surge of emotion. From that time forward not a cheer was heard from him when the Premier was speaking, no word was ever noticed to pass between them, till several of those who knew him best made up their minds that for some reason or other he was either disgruntled or in disgrace. Then, one morning and the honour's list was out. Only two peers had been created and, lo! he was one of them, a Baron, 'for political services'. 'That fellow Plaster's been made a peer!—I wonder what

it cost him—— They must have wanted his seat for someone else'—and so on and so on, as comments were bandied to and fro, while the real reason was never guessed.

Twelve months later a disconsolate figure might have been seen sitting in the Library of the House of Lords. Lord Pugley of Pugley was writing to his wife. The room was a desert but for himself and the librarian at a table in a corner. A few minutes previously his Lordship had quitted the Chamber, likewise a desert, save for half a dozen somnolent lay peers and one deaf Bishop. Hardly a soul knew him by name, except the clerks, the messengers, and the police. Hitherto he had been under the impression that the Second Chamber was much like the other one, only nobler, more restrained and dignified, smarter, a sort of *edition de luxe*. That there would be the same good fellowship and intimacy, the same readiness to listen to an argument, the same easy give-and-take that he had been used to. That the only difference would be that, as a Peer of the Realm, he would be consorting with dukes and earls, spending weekends possibly with them, interchanging ideas about the social equilibrium, deliberating upon the best methods for preserving the established order—all in a highly esoteric and distinguished manner. That, apart from a more refined and exclusive environment, it would be merely exchanging one Club for another, a shifting of quarters, as it were, from Garrick Street to Pall Mall. But the reality was altogether different. He had never imagined that his presence and opinions would not carry a feather's weight in that more arrogant

assembly—that he would never come within a hundred leagues of winning the intimacy of the great territorial order, who by their chosen representatives and by reason of historical tradition, ran the real business of the Upper House. There was no *camaraderie* here for such as him. He was probably reckoned lucky to have squeezed himself in at the door, and by the very fact of his regular attendance proved himself to be what he was, a mere upstart and outsider. He had not been born to it, nor even won a claim upon the notice of his fellow-peers through one of the great offices of State. For all the contribution he could make to the life of the place he might have been a tourist standing in a foreign cathedral, aloof and unobserved, while the priestly hierarchy in a dead tongue conducted the rites of their religion.

No one had ever heard of Lord Pugley, or ever wanted to. When he encountered his friends at the other end of the passage, or in his county or Club, they apologized for not recollecting the title he had taken, although he had had it a year. As Plaster he had been somebody, as Baron Pugley he was a complete cypher. His constituency had been proud of him. Everyone had known Sir Augustus Plaster, Bart., M.P., and wrote to him in their troubles. He had had influence. His questions sometimes found their way into the papers and were commented on. He had been a public man, representing many thousands of electors who admired and looked to him for the protection of their interests. In the lobbies of the Commons Ministers of the Crown used to slip their arms in his and listened, or pretended to listen, to what he had to say. He had hobnobbed

with the highest, with men of rank and genius, retailing the gossip afterwards to admiring circles. But what a metamorphosis was now here! The peers as a whole were utterly unaware of his existence, for most of them never came near the House. As for the others, he might have been a piece of barrack furniture, and the knowledge little by little dawned upon him that nothing he could do would ever melt the ice of their indifference. It was as though he had died and come to life again in another shape, for his former political associates were gradually forgetting that he was still alive. Out of sight, out of mind, and, as far as they were concerned, soon he might never have lived at all. What folly to have left the other House! And later on his son would be Pugley of Pugley, and then his son's son, equally ignored. He seemed literally to have come down in the world and had the uneasy feeling that all his former colleagues thought so too. He had lost prestige and what had he really gained? For, after all, what was a new lord worth nowadays, and who cared a brass farthing for him? As he numbered off the men who had recently been ennobled, who had trickled through from the other end of the corridor, he realized how out of the picture they all looked. And no one took any notice of them either. Yet this was what he and they had slaved for, intrigued or paid for.

What a poor, silly fish he had been! This glittering fly that was naught but a hook; this tinsel of which he could never divest himself, of no distinction and affording no pleasure! He lay awake at night worrying about it, musing, musing. If he were even a

Viscount, it would have been different; but this Barony of Pugley, faugh! And a kind of nausea swept over him, as he watched the dawn stealing through the curtains; while, if the ejaculation of his soul could have reached the outside world, as his Lordship rolled himself over away from the light, it would have heard the cry, wrung from the very depths of his tormented spirit—'I want, I want.'

XIV

LETTER TO A NEPHEW

My dear Eddie—Although I promised to jot down one or two thoughts about the House of Commons, now that I have put pen to paper, I hardly know where to begin or how to end. When I left the House last Session, after thirty years of Parliamentary life, resigning the family seat to your care, I made up my mind to thrust my political past behind me without repining or regret, with as little retrospect as possible, and to start a new life of leisure and self-indulgence. That will still be my intention when I drop this in the pillar-box at the top of St. James' Street some time this evening.

Heaven forbid that I should proffer you advice! Whenever I have been foolish enough to hand out advice, I have generally only succeeded in irritating the recipients and not recovered their goodwill till they had forgotten all about it. No, this letter is merely to bid you God-speed. It is not meant to be counsel, but reminiscence in the lightest of veins, just to remind you that the septuagenarian, who now haunts the bric-à-brac shops of Mayfair and Soho, was at one time in public life himself and takes an avuncular interest in his nephew's career.

You might not suspect it, but what always attracted me in politics was the study of the motives

that governed men and shaped their conduct from day to day. Of the other sex, I, as a crusted bachelor, am comparatively ill-informed, unlike yourself, you young rascal, married, as you are now, to a charming and clever wife. Another interesting feature was the party machine with all its ramifications and personalities from the Leader downwards. It is a ticklish job being Leader, for however halcyon the outlook, you can always hear the wolves of the party howling in the background, waiting their chance, which always comes sooner or later, to pull him down. He has to be meticulously careful in the choice of a personal bodyguard. An over-zealous henchman will smell traitors at every corner and, in lieu of concentrating his energies where they are really wanted, dart like an errant hound after some innocent hare or rabbit, to the detriment of the chase. Indeed, these devoted lackeys will scent treachery in every criticism and disloyalty in every difference of opinion, and, instead of helping their hero's career, will so exasperate by cold looks and veiled threats meant to be reported, that they will be driving nails into his coffin all the time. But the machine itself takes no cognizance of private loyalties and cares for nothing except how an election can be won and a hard-earned majority kept together. Whips and agents, secretaries and Chairmen, the rank and file of the party, even a Leader's own chief colleagues, will be remarkably loyal while the going is good, but, if dirty weather sets in, start at once hunting for a substitute and discard the old love like a worn shoe, without a tear—all but those who may be his personal cronies, or have no prospects elsewhere, or

shrewdly suspect that he may yet turn the corner to reward the astrologers who knew how to cast the truer horoscope.

Every Leader has his ups and downs and, when he is in the trough, you can see the perturbation printed large in the countenances of his followers. Shall they stick to him or leave him? And all the time the lobbies hum with the crisis—those who would gain by a change, grave and sorrowful, concerned seemingly for the public good only; while those who would lose by it run about excitedly, trying to flog up support for a losing cause. The Leader meanwhile is at his wit's end, for although many hands are stretched out, he hesitates to grasp any, not knowing whether they will push him under or pull him out. All this happens with considerable regularity every eight or nine years, and the issue depends with equal constancy on whether some willing alternative is at hand sufficiently popular or powerful to take the helm. In the absence of such, the revolt collapses like a house of cards, the skipper recovers his hold upon the wheel, and the *Big Bassoon* in oracular journalese winds up a leading article with a few smug periods, heralding the defeat of the mutineers by those who knew how to put country before party and the public weal in front of sectional interests and selfish aims. But, in the other event, the same journal is similarly equal to the occasion and, after consultation in the proper quarter, devotes a column of unctuous opportunism to the commendation of those who, from patriotic motives and with a disregard of all private affection, sank personal predilections for the good of the State.

As I daresay you know, I never took politics too painfully, or, to put it more exactly, never allowed duty to ruin my digestion. For a short time I was a Whip, but it was so ungrateful a job standing at the door of the lobby appealing to those who had been left out of the honours' list not to go out to dinner, and I got so bored with the mentality of the Whips' room, that after a year of it I made some adequate excuse and retired from the glory of the front bench to the comparative obscurity of one under the Gallery. Although the House of Commons is in many ways a fascinating Club, it is far from being even a tolerable restaurant. There is no idealism in the *cuisine*. Food which may possibly contain the right number of vitamins is dished up luke-warm when it should be cold and tepid when it ought to be hot. And, above and beyond this, an atmosphere of caution reigns over the repasts, for the climbers who purvey information are sitting all around you, ever on the watch for an unguarded word to show which way the tide is running. Now, I like to be at my ease at the festive board. It is the hour for mental as well as physical relaxation. And, if I affectionately make fun of my Leaders, one for his conversation, or another because he has no conversation at all, why should I be docketed by some callow popinjay as a dangerous or disgruntled person? For I always voted for my party, more particularly when I was convinced that it was clearly in the wrong.

The people I felt sorriest for in the Parliamentary precincts were the Lobby correspondents, famished employees of the great newspapers. How eager they were for news! For their bread and meat depended

on it and often they were obliged to make bricks without straw. It was little short of miraculous what substantial structures they could build out of the most meagre materials. No wonder they had their favourites, for they literally had to live by gossip. It was a matter of honourable exchange between members and themselves—a piece of useful information at the right moment, a hint for a paragraph, and in return a tactful puff, the announcement of a question to be asked or a speech to be delivered. A pat on the back from the Editor might depend on the one and a little more consideration from the Whips follow on the other. It was a most amiable and busy mart, conducted according to well-recognized rules, and the poor scribes engaged in it, as well as the Gallery correspondents, could always find solace in the reflection that, just as reputations they tried to inflate by and by resumed their normal dimensions none the better for the puff of wind, so neither could they injure for more than a very fleeting period any of those they ignored or belittled.

It was always a pleasure to stroll along the Terrace on a warm evening. The scene used to remind one of a Whistler *Nocturne*—the peace and solemnity of the famous river, the myriad lights, the bridges with their passing freight, the gibbous moon reflected in the water, the towers and chimneys, the murmur of a great city. So much hope was centred here, so much thought and energy had been expended to bring us all together, and very soon there would be another swarm pelting through the corridors and labouring in the cells, and yet another, swarm upon swarm, generation after generation,

with the stars looking down, indifferent and eternal. It is surprising that members do not make more use of the Terrace at this its most romantic hour, when harsh outlines are softened into beauty and ugliness is transfigured by the spell of Night. Is it for fear that their practical ambitions may be sublimated by the poetry around them, and that some siren strain may lure them from the dreary path of prose?

Question time was always to me the most exhilarating part of the Parliamentary proceedings. The member who found it difficult to catch the Speaker's eye or had no gift for debate, could mumble his questions and send the answers to his local Press, when simple-minded constituents would rejoice at the nerve and assiduity of their representative and be under the impression that he had 'held' the House. There was always a chance, too, that by a supplementary query he might pink with the point of his rapier the equanimity of some Minister he actively disliked. There was none of the teasing repetition at question time that you have in debate, but a variety of give and take, *riposte* and repartee, and many a Parliamentary reputation has been started on the flimsy foundation of a tart reply. Far more advertisement in proportion is given to questions than to speeches, and an oration of forty minutes during the dinner-hour on the state of the nation, however admirable, will not win a tenth of the publicity accorded perhaps to half a dozen words, deftly interposed, in some frivolous exchange about the duck in Hyde Park. I have also seen a little insult not come amiss. It sometimes teaches a Minister to mind his manners and pay more atten-

tion to the humour of the House. For everyone in time finds his level there. The novelist, traveller, scientist, banker, scholar, plutocrat, the breeder of shorthorns, the newspaper proprietor, the heir to great estates, all sit together and no one cares a row of pins about their fame outside. What matters is the grist they can bring to the business of the Assembly. A reputation may be as unsavoury as a month-old corpse, but all is forgotten in a witty speech. Or a member may be as pure as St. Francis, and they will race from the Chamber when he gets up to speak.

But do not jump to the conclusion, Eddie, that I never took politics seriously. What I tried to achieve was not to take *myself* too seriously. The mystery of Life was ever a serious matter with me, and what can be more mysterious than the febrile efforts of political manikins to shape Destiny? What also can be more boring than an inferior brain with a 'mission', or an intolerant prig with only one point of view, or some high-principled person with prejudices as stupid as himself? So that when you meet anyone with catholic sympathies, who can see both sides of a question, the cockles of your heart warm to him at once. How tedious is the fanatic, the man of one idea, especially if he is honest, for you are then supposed to respect his opinions, although he may be a perfect dolt! How tedious too and commonplace are many of the 'successful' men. As a rule they are the supple fellows who can trim their sails, entering Parliament to secure a job rather than to get things done. That is why so many place-hunters attain office and not only get it, but keep

it, for it is what they have concentrated all their energies upon. They have no 'cause' at heart but their own. Among these may be found the plate-lickers of politics, and a portion of every Ministry is composed of them. If one of them, however, be badly disappointed in his expectation, you will see him removing his tongue from the platter and starting to fawn upon someone else. The ablest men, on the other hand, generally appreciate power more than mere office and, if necessary, will invent a 'cause' to obtain it. Out of the blue some public wrong will be discovered, some crying scandal that hitherto has cried in vain, some sacred right that is in jeopardy, and, if the new evangelist is dangerous enough, after various attempts by the party machine to discredit him, he will be given a post of influence, when the poor downtrodden Paphlagonians, the shocking waste of public monies, the outraged privileges of private members, are straightway forgotten.

I must now close this exceedingly worthless epistle. When I look back upon my own career, I am conscious of having done my best not to waste the precious gift of time, for I always felt that life was all too brief and so tried to squeeze the most out of it and not to put too great a strain upon the human mechanism. During all-night sittings I used to sleep in one of the upper lobbies stretched on a bench, abstaining from food and all drink but water, and feeling as fresh as paint the next day. It was a sad spectacle watching some of the members gradually killing themselves, dying by inches in the 'performance of their duty', contributing nothing, however, to the amusement or usefulness of the House, and

gaining no respect. One man attended all the divisions for five whole years; lunched, tea'd and dined at the House throughout the week, got there at ten o'clock in the morning to transact his correspondence and sat through the debates like a graven image. Every day he asked three uninteresting questions, but hardly ever made a speech and, when he did, it was as dry as a biscuit and carried not the slightest weight. The Whips despised and disliked him too, for he beat their own record for attendance. As the months went by he got yellower and leaner, and one night, when he was 'telling' in a division, suddenly fell down in a syncope, dying in a couple of hours, and only a dozen people went to the Memorial Service that had to be held. I remember a curious case of another member. He too was a constant source of wonder to me, for he never spoke to anyone and no one ever seemed to speak to him. In debate and at question time he was as mute as a mole. But he was always in the Chamber or writing letters in the library or washing his hands in the lavatory. His division record was also amazing. But he lived apart from the social life of the House and ate his meals in the far corner of one of the Members' Dining-Rooms at a table by himself. His dress was neat, and his scanty hair and moustache a uniform black; yet he sometimes looked so exhausted that you almost expected him to collapse. I never could guess his age, but used to put it at anything between fifty and fifty-six. For over ten years I watched him, and he never seemed to grow much older, his hair remaining as dark and his dress as neat as ever, although he became rather

thinner in the face and a trifle bent. Then one day, at the beginning of a new Session, after a long summer recess, I noticed a little, old, white-haired man sitting in the seat where the other had always been. His moustache was snow-white too and, as he leant forward with his hand to his ear, he had a shrunken look, as though he could scarcely fill his clothes. I stared and stared, passed him at close quarters and at last I knew. It was the same man. He had ceased to dye his hair. The desire to look young had left him and you saw him as he was, after all these years of fruitless drudgery, a small, dried-up figure of over seventy, lonely, deaf, feeble, pathetic, at the end of his tether. Within a year he too was dead. Not one member in ten had ever known his name and no memorial service was held. If there had been one, I should have gone.

My dear boy, it is not worth it—not that. Life is too short. I have enjoyed nearly every moment of my own and so probably shall live to be ninety. But I have remembered you in my will. Indeed there is no one else for me to remember, for the rest of our family seem to have taken themselves too seriously and so died early. Personally I have always joyfully seized what there was to get and cheerfully given of my best in return within my modest means. If this be not a sound philosophy, you must, when we meet, tell me what is, for no one is readier still to learn than your old and affectionate—Uncle Algy.

XV

OBSTRUCTION

(Committee of the whole House—Early morning)

Mr. Particle: Mr. Douce, I rise to move the amendment that stands in my name—— In line four of the second proviso of subsection three of Clause eight, Part I of the Bill, to substitute the word 'may' for the word 'shall'. Mr. Douce, we have now reached, if I may say so, one of the most important amendments on the Committee stage. (Laughter.) It is all very well for the hon. member for North Cockney to laugh. It would have been more to the purpose if he had followed the debate on the Bill instead of having only just sauntered in.

Mr. Rottendammer: On a point of order, Mr. Douce —I never even smiled, although I might have done so, and moreover I have sat here all the time.

Mr. Particle: I was not referring to the hon. member for North Cockney. I was alluding to the hon. member for the Wopshire division.

Mr. Boils: Mr. Douce, is the hon. member in order in making offensive remarks of this sort? I attend to my duties in this House every whit as well as he does, and possibly more so. (Cheers.)

The Chairman (Mr. Douce): I deprecate these personal references on either side and hope that hon. members will keep to the amendment before the Committee.

Mr. Particle: I can assure you, sir, that I have every

intention of keeping strictly to the subject of this amendment. I was saying, when I was twice interrupted by hon. members opposite, that this was a very important amendment.

Colonel Nitty: On a point of order, Mr. Douce. I have a distinct recollection of an exactly similar amendment being moved last week on an earlier clause, and with the same intention, and being rejected by a large majority. Is it not a rule, sir, when an amendment has once been defeated, that the same amendment is not allowed to be moved again and again on later clauses? I submit, Mr. Douce, that if it were allowed, we should be wasting many hours on repetition of arguments already used.

The Chairman: I wish that were the only occasion on which repetition was possible. (Hear, hear.) I think that the amendment referred to by the hon. and gallant member was on a different point—to substitute the word 'any' for the word 'the' in line five of the proviso to clause 2. That amendment was defeated after a prolonged debate and I do not propose to call it again when the same amendment down in the name of another hon. member is reached.

Sir Hilary Blood: If you are referring to my amendment, Mr. Douce, may I remind you, sir, that it is an entirely different one from that which I moved last week on clause 2 and on quite a different point. It is true there was a long debate, but the amendment I then moved was to substitute the word 'the' for the word 'a' in line eleven of the proviso.

The Chairman: When we come to the hon. Baronet's amendment, he can raise the point of order, if neces-

sary. For the moment we are dealing with the amendment of the hon. member for Smilewood. Mr. Particle.

Mr. Particle: As I was remarking, Mr. Douce, when I was interrupted for the third time, we have now reached an amendment dealing with a most important point in the Bill. It may seem to some hon. members that there is very little difference between the word 'may' and the word 'shall'. Mr. Douce, I have had the advantage of looking up the word 'may' in the Oxford Dictionary. This is what it says——

An hon. member: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman; when an hon. member quotes from a document in this House, is he not obliged to produce the whole of the document? The hon. member has quoted from the Oxford Dictionary and not produced it. I ask him to do so. (Interruption.)

The Chairman: Order! Order! The Oxford Dictionary is not a document.

Mr. Particle: This is what it says: 'expressing ability or power—expressing objective possibility, opportunity or absence of prohibitive conditions'—and an example is given of the use of the word—'You may force fruit, but you cannot force flavour'. (Ironical cheers.) I hope that hon. members will note the complete absence of compulsion in the word 'may', although I once heard a learned Solicitor General argue to the contrary in this House. Now, the word 'shall' is altogether different. This is what the dictionary says. After dealing with its special interrogative, ironical and exclamatory uses, it says it is used —'in stating a necessary condition, indicating what is appointed or settled to take place in commands

or instructions'—such as in—'thou shalt do no murder'. (Voice—'I wish someone would murder you.') Could there be a more fundamental distinction between any two words? Although I am a loyal supporter of the Government, I tell them quite candidly that in my judgment. . . . (Voice—'put a sock in it' —and cries of 'Order'.)

An hon. member: On a point of order, Mr. Douce, is the hon. member opposite in order in making use of an offensive expression about my hon. friend the member for Smilewood?

The Chairman: I did not catch what was said.

Same hon. member: The hon. member for North Cockney told my hon. friend to 'put a sock in it'. I ask you on a point of order, sir, whether it is permissible to use a highly offensive expression like that about my hon. friend.

The Chairman: I have never heard the expression before and do not in the least know what it means. If it was meant to be offensive, I must ask hon. members to restrain themselves and not to make interruptions of this character when other hon. members are speaking. Mr. Particle——

Mr. Particle: I have no objection, Mr. Douce, to interruptions when they are relevant and intelligible; but I do take exception to senseless animal noises in our debates. (Cries of 'Order! Order!' and interruption.)

The Chairman: Order! Order!

Mr. Particle: As I was saying, the Committee knows that I am a wholehearted supporter of the Government. They have now been two years in office and I challenge any hon. member opposite to quote a

single occasion when I have voted against my party on any matter of principle. Only last Session, and hon. members will recollect the incident quite well, when the Government brought in a bill dealing with performing animals—— (Voice—'You are one'.)

An hon. member: On a point of order, Mr. Douce, if I am correct, we are on the subject of sewage disposal. Now, I've sat here for the last twenty minutes, listening to the best of my ability, and the hon. member for Smilewood has not mentioned sewage once. The only specific question he has referred to is performing animals. What I would like to ask you, Mr. Douce, very respectfully, is this—are we dealing with performing animals (Voice—'Yes') or are we supposed to be debating sewage?

The Chairman: I have been waiting for the hon. member for Smilewood to develop his argument, but he has taken a considerable time in approaching the subject of the amendment. Perhaps the hon. gentleman will now tell us how he connects his amendment with the question of sewers.

Mr. Particle: With great respect, Mr. Douce, I am not dealing with the question of sewers. May I submit to you, sir, that the matter before the Committee is sewage. It is hardly necessary for me to point out that this is a totally different problem. If it had been merely a matter of sewers, I should not have asked the Committee at this hour of the night to alter the word 'may' to 'shall'. It is sewage we are dealing with, and I propose to adhere to it.

Hon. Member: Mr. Douce, on a point of order, I have been making a calculation while the hon. member has been moving his amendment, and I

find that, taking into consideration the salaries of members of this House and that of the Minister of Agriculture, and adding an approximate sum for staff, lighting, heating, printing, etc., the hon. member for Smilewood during the time he has been speaking has cost the taxpayer £136.

The Chairman: That is not a point of order.

Hon. member: What I want, sir, to submit to you is this. Is an hon. member to be allowed to waste public money and the time of Parliament in moving these nonsensical amendments? (Loud cheers and cries of 'Order! Order!')

The Chairman: Order! Order! I called on the hon. member for Smilewood to move his amendment and am still waiting to hear how it bears upon the question of sewage, which is the only matter before the Committee. Perhaps the hon. gentleman will now come to grips with his amendment.

Mr. Particle: I have said all I want to say and beg to move.

Mr. Peewit: Mr. Douce, I rise to second the amendment of my hon. friend. Although, sir, I may be a member of the much-abused legal profession, I am not supporting this amendment for the sake of any legal or verbal quibble, but because, as my hon. friend argued, it contains a principle which goes to the very root of sewage disposal. As it happens, on the outskirts of the town I have the honour to represent there is one of the most up-to-date sewage plants in the country. I spent last Saturday going over it, knowing that I was to take part in this debate. The members of the Sewage Board who accompanied me showed me a tumbler of treated

sewage that was absolutely free from taint and which they said could be drunk with as little harm as pure water. Although I did not drink it myself, the Board assured me they had drunk several tumblers in the presence of the Mayor and Corporation two years ago on the anniversary of the opening of the works. The march of science, Mr. Douce, is indeed marvellous. Who would have believed, when your predecessor sat in that chair, sir, that his successor would be listening to a statement like this? 'God works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform'. It is for this reason that nothing should be done to hamper the beneficent progress now taking place. My hon. friend's amendment will safeguard this. Only last session a similar amendment was accepted by the Government on the Performing Animals Bill. It will be in the recollection of the Committee that a suggestion was then made to include monkeys in the category of performing animals. I myself moved that amendment, which took the very form of the present one, and now monkeys are not allowed to perform in public except under strict supervision. (A Voice—'They ought to be supervised here'.) In that particular case, only anthropoid apes were affected, but some day, I hope. . . .

An hon. member: On a point of order, Mr. Douce, are we discussing the question of anthropoid apes or sewers? If the hon. member is allowed to deal with the question of apes, may other members take part in the discussion?

The Chairman: We are neither discussing the question of anthropoid apes nor sewers. The amendment before the Committee deals with sewage. I under-

stand the hon. and learned member was merely using an illustration, but perhaps he will now come back to the amendment.

Mr. Peewit: Yes, Mr. Douce, I do not wish to pursue the illustration any further. There is nothing more I want to add. One of these days an historian may be reading an account of this debate, and I venture to say that nothing will surprise him more than . . . (Loud and continued cries of 'hear, hear.')

The Minister of Agriculture: Mr. Douce, I listened very carefully to my hon. friend who moved the amendment and also to my hon. and learned friend who seconded it, and I am still at a loss to understand in what way it could possibly assist us in achieving what we all desire, namely, the disposal of sewage to the best advantage. During three weeks of the summer recess I took the opportunity of visiting no less than fifteen large centres of sewage disposal in fifteen different counties, where the most recent methods are employed. (Hear, hear.) During the daytime I walked many miles in the sewage areas in order to test the question as to how far the air was tainted and to note the effect of it upon the vegetation; and at night I was most hospitably put up by the managers of the different plants, when we were able to go into the economic and even æsthetic side of the matter. (Hear, hear.) There is no more vital question to-day than that of sewage disposal. Sewage may not be romantic in the ordinary sense of the term, but I can assure the House, strange as it may seem, that it has its fascinating aspect. I shall never forget gazing over a large sewage area in Devonshire with the early morning sun upon it, 'gilding pale

streams with heavenly alchemy'—and thinking to myself how all that waste product would be ultimately used for the food of the people, for the fertilization of spring greens, rhubarb, and carrots too, a valuable food. (A Voice—'for donkeys'—and laughter.) I must say I am unable to see what grounds there are for merriment in this Bill. (Hear, hear, and same voice 'In you'.) As I was about to say, I thought to myself how many thousands of platefuls of nourishment were represented by the scene in front of me. (Hear, hear.) Let us not, Mr. Douce, do anything to impede this work. Reference has been made to an amendment on the Performing Animals Bill in support of the present proposals. It would not be in order, sir, for me to do more than make a passing allusion to it, but I may say that when monkeys were included in that measure it was on the distinct understanding——

Mr. Peewit: It was only anthropoid apes that were included.

Minister of Agriculture: I think my hon. and learned friend is mistaken. If my memory serves me right, the principal amendment was to include the whole class of monkeys.

An hon. member: Mr. Douce, can the Right Honourable Gentleman say whether the whole class of monkeys includes missing links? (Cries of 'Order'.)

Mr. Peewit: Perhaps, Mr. Douce, I may intervene, since the Right Hon. Gentleman has referred to my amendment. It is true there was an amendment to include all monkeys, but the Government argued that, if all monkeys were included, it might prove extremely awkward (Voice—'it would') and I moved

the amendment to limit the proposal to anthropoid apes.

An hon. member: Was not that equally awkward, Mr. Chairman?

Another hon. member: On a point of order, Mr. Douce—this is the third time that the question of Performing Animals has been introduced into this debate. I am quite prepared to debate the question of performing monkeys and to remind you, Mr. Douce, that you may have to call some of them to order. (Cries of 'order' and interruption.)

The Chairman: Order! Order! What is the point of order that the hon. member wishes to raise?

Same hon. member: My point of order, sir, is this—shall I be entitled to go into this question of performing monkeys and raise it as a matter of privilege that no hon. or learned member having a personal interest should be allowed to record a vote on the subject. (Interruption.)

The Chairman: Order! Order! The hon. member must not abuse his right of raising points of order.

Another hon member: On a further point of order, Mr. Douce——

The Chairman: Order! Order! We cannot go on with this discussion. The bill before the Committee is the Sewage Bill and has nothing to do with Performing Animals, at least I hope not. (Laughter.)

Minister of Agriculture: I will certainly obey your ruling, Mr. Douce. I could say much more on this subject of sewage, but do not want to detain the Committee. My hon. friend's amendment would not have the effect he desires, but probably the very opposite. He is, I know, at one with me in his

enthusiasm to make the best use of sewage, and so is my hon. and learned friend. To put any spoke in the wheel of sewage disposal, or, to express it more correctly, to check this splendid flow of sewage which is benefiting so large a portion of the community would be little better than a disaster at this stage of our development. After what I have said, perhaps my hon. friend will not think it worth while to press his amendment. He may rest assured that the Ministry over which I have the honour to preside have got this important problem very near their hearts. (Cheers.)

Mr. Particle: Although I should have been glad to see my amendment accepted, I wish to thank my Right Hon. Friend for his extremely sympathetic attitude, and I accept his assurance that his Department will keep this matter constantly in front of them (Voice—'under their noses') and therefore beg leave to withdraw my amendment.

An hon. member: On a point of order, Mr. Douce, on the same basis of calculation this preposterous debate has now cost the taxpayer a sum of no less than £640, while destitute men and women only a few hundred yards away are crowding the benches of the Embankment.

The Chairman: That is not a point of order. Is it your pleasure that the amendment be withdrawn? Amendment by leave withdrawn. (Laughter and ironical cheers.)

XVI

A GREEK MASTERPIECE

ON a bitterly cold December morning, in 1921, I set out from Florence on a pilgrimage to Bologna. As I walked through the olive grove down to the gate of the little *podere* and looked out over the silent city lying white in the dawn, with its domes and palaces and winding river, I thought how irresistible a hold the beautiful in art has over men; how pilgrims from all parts of Christendom visit this spot as they would a shrine, bringing with them the spirit of worship that lifts them for the time being out of the rut of material things, and taking home with them memories of loveliness upon which they feast for many a day, precious scrolls which they can unfold and gaze at amid the drab surroundings of their own lives.

It was in this frame of mind that I had engaged in the adventure. The train to Bologna was slow almost past endurance, and the thermometer so low that my fellow-passengers and I had to stand up in the carriage from time to time and stamp about to keep ourselves warm. In and out of the valleys we wound, with hills upon every side and of every colour. Diminutive habitations perched upon isolated and apparently inaccessible rocks, water-courses strewn with titanic boulders, leafless osiers flaming like torches, grass-grown terraces rising one

above the other almost to the clouds, scattered villages and orchards with backgrounds of scarred and frowning cliff, with here and there a glimpse of yet sublimer ranges; all these gave us a varied and inexhaustible picture as we crawled along.

At length, with frozen feet and after nearly six hours, we reached Bologna, a journey of only ninety miles. The tourist, it is said, does not much heed this ancient city of the Emilia. He goes to Florence or Venice, to Pisa or Ravenna, but Bologna as a rule is considered as having nothing much to offer. In this he may be partially right. She can boast certainly of one of the largest churches in Italy which, had it been completed, would have outrivalled the Duomo of Brunelleschi. There is also the Torre Garisenda, the leaning tower, which, though it may one day fall, will still be recalled in Dante's *Inferno*. There are some fine Françias and Raphael's St. Cecilia, the latter well known, though perhaps not on a level with his greatest work. There are, besides the twin Piazzas of Vittorio Emanuele and del Nettuno, with John of Bologna's colossal fountain and the picturesque mediæval buildings that almost enclose them. And, what is more characteristic of this town than perhaps aught else, there are the endless arcades that line each side of the principal streets, erected, so it is said, to shelter the inhabitants from the snowstorms of winter and, in summer, from the fierceness of the sun's heat. It would certainly be possible on a rainy day to walk about the town for hours beneath these broad porticoes dry-shod and in perfect comfort. But in spite of all this, no one who has visited Bologna will seriously maintain that

she can compare with some of the other cities of Northern Italy, either for the beauty of her architecture or the quantity or quality of her other treasures.

Yet I had gone there to see the best ancient copy of perhaps the finest Greek head in the world. In the hotel where I lodged no one seemed ever to have heard of it. The establishment had been taken over from a German, who in his day had placed a plaster cast of the head in the entrance-hall and another at the end of a passage on the first floor; and an Englishman, to whom I spoke, who had been a guest there for nearly two months, presumably going the usual round of the galleries and museums, not only did not know of the existence of such a head in Bologna, but apparently thought that the two casts were of different ladies and originals! It is on occasions like these that one is inclined to doubt whether, after all, the ardour of the relic-hunter is not misdirected, and to ask oneself who really is the bigger fool, he who goes a six hours' journey to look at a bust, or the man who would not walk a dozen yards out of his way to see it. The latter may be able to read the heavens as you would a book; or he may be versed in the secrets of insect life or the processes of geological formation. What does he think of *your* ignorance, knowing naught of these and perhaps caring as little? His wonder at the mighty miracle of the Universe, the worlds about us, and the life and structure of the planet where we stand—the study of these fans a flame of enthusiasm in him as bright as any produced in others by the performances of men. The only difference is, that

the first are systems outside our influence and independent of human agency, creations of a mind and parts of a scheme that we cannot comprehend; whereas the latter are productions of our own kind, efforts to express what divinity there may be in them, the ideas and visions that have come to them in their dreams. In the one case, we marvel at the power and magnificence of a Being whose works overwhelm our imagination with their splendour and infinite detail. In the other, we stand amazed at the divine creation that has issued from so feeble a creature as man. The wonder here is as deep as the other, but for a different reason, and it is tinctured with a sense of kinship, for though we may not ourselves have the genius to express our longings and ideals in verse or marble or other form, we are able to fathom the thoughts and sympathize with the feelings of those who can.

In the plastic art of ancient Greece, the great statuaries reached the very summit of this power of self-expression. There is nothing sublimer or more beautiful than some of the statues that have survived to our own time, either in old copies or, in rarer instances, from the actual hands of the masters themselves. In this art the Greeks of twenty-three centuries ago still reign supreme, for their craftsmanship died with them, and no one since has done so well. Even Michael Angelo cannot rival them here. His spirit was too turbulent. He tried to freeze into motionless stone passions that could not take its shape, to torture the changeless spirit of the marble into convulsions and contortions that leave one with a sense of something incongruous and imperfect.

The secret of the Greeks was that their subject-matter was subdued to the material they worked in. The emotions they represented seemed to be eternal and the children of a great calm. The Aphrodite of Arles blends an inimitable grace in the carriage of the head with a dreaming look that nothing can disturb. The Aphrodite of Melos is the embodiment of divine repose. She is womanly and yet a goddess, with a bearing full of grandeur and nobility. The Aphrodite of Capua, said to be by Skopas, has this same quality of serenity, a divinity and peace unruffled by the billows of life's storm. And, to take one more instance, the Pallas of Velletri, attributed to Kresilas, with its tremendous dignity and commanding aspect, is proof against the vicissitudes of time and fortune. It is all the greater tribute to their authors that three out of these four marble statues are merely copies, although ancient ones, the Aphrodite of Melos being the only original among them. Indeed, so little is there left from the actual chisels of the classic artists, that of original work of the highest class, the more or less perfect statues can almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. The Hermes of Praxiteles at Olympia is the only undisputed original statue in existence by one of the celebrated artists of antiquity, and with the exception of the Aphrodite of Melos and one or two others, the whole of the remainder have come down to us in copies only, of varying resemblance and merit. We can only guess what the real Diadumenos and Doryphoros of Polykleitos were like, or the Aphrodite of Knidos by Praxiteles, or Myron's Diskobolos, or the Apoxyomenos of Lykippos.

By whom was the Bologna head? It stood then upon a pedestal in one of the upper rooms of the Museo Civico among a mass of inferior and less interesting antiquities. So little prominence was given to it, that I watched several tourists pass it with scarcely a glance and, as is the way of many tourists, concentrate their attention upon comparatively unimportant exhibits within three or four paces of it. Professor Furtwängler, one of the most learned authorities, maintains that it is an early reproduction of the head of the famous statue of the Lemnian Athena by Pheidias. He adduces a variety of cogent and convincing arguments in support of his theory, and for the purpose of this slight sketch his view may well be adopted, although it is only fair to say that it has been disputed by other and more recent writers, who regard it as the work of Alkamenes, a contemporary of Pheidias. If, however, Professor Furtwängler's conclusion be the correct one, the Lemnian Athena has come down to us in three old copies, two of which are imperfect. The first is at Dresden, where the statue is comparatively complete, although the hands and most of the arms are unfortunately missing, and the head has been considerably worked over and much restored. The head, moreover, has at some time been broken from the torso and afterwards rejoined. The second copy is also at Dresden, a torso without hands or arms, and a cast of the Bologna head has been fitted to it. The third, the subject of these pages, is, as has been said, in the Museo Civico at Bologna. It is the head without the torso and, being in excellent preservation, is therefore the only existing ancient copy

which produces a large part of what must have been the exquisite charm of the original.

Now the Lemnian Athena stood on the Acropolis, most likely on the left of the road, just after passing northwards through the Propylaia. From a rough copy on an engraved gem it would appear that the goddess grasped a lance with her extended left hand, the butt resting on the ground, and in her right held a helmet in the direction of which she was looking. The statue was in bronze and probably life-size, and was made by Pheidias for the Attic Kleruchs, who went to Lemnos. It was usual for such colonists, before they left, to honour the gods with dedicatory statues, and these stood together, as has been proved by inscriptions found near one another on the famous hill. The Kleruchies were generally organized for the purpose of ridding Athens of troublesome citizens or of superfluous inhabitants whom it was difficult to feed. The Kleruchs had their own leader, but remained Athenian citizens, dependent on the mother city, the custom being for members of the ten tribes to send in their names to the Senate, and when it had been decided by lot who was to get the lands in the new colony, the expedition with its leader started on its way. Both Lucian and Pausanias, who actually saw the Lemnian Athena *in situ* in the second century of our era, agreed that of all of the works of Pheidias it was the finest. It was executed, moreover, when the illustrious sculptor was well on in middle age. The Lemnian Kleruchy took place probably between 451 and 448-7 B.C., which gives the date of the statue, and tradition tells us that upon its base was inscribed not only a dedi-

cation, but also Pheidias' own signature as artist. But as Pheidias was born about 500 B.C., he must have been fifty years of age when he made it, or a little older than when he executed the Athena Parthenos in gold and ivory. The statue was probably on a high pediment, for the legs are rather short for the body. The spectator, when passing it, would thus have had to look up to see it, and as the trunk would have appeared somewhat fore-shortened, the lower half would have been in harmony with the rest. The Goddess stood with her head turned to the right and bent slightly down looking at the departing colonists and waiting for their ultimate return, when hers would be almost the first face to greet them.

The Bologna masterpiece, the most interesting historical and artistic possession of the mediæval city, is of a (now) yellowish marble and somewhat badly stained. But, except for this, it is admirably preserved and remains to-day perhaps the loveliest head in statuary in the world. Next to it there stands, in black gesso, the torso of the Dresden statue with a cast of the Bologna head in the same material fitted to it. The shape and shadows of the beautiful face are in some ways better seen in this dark plaster, which more closely resembles the tone of the original bronze, than in the marble, and still more clearly in the bronze reproduction of the head in the British Museum. The features are those of a young maiden and are almost boyish, for it is the time of life when maidenhood and boyhood still retain that growing look and that aspect of innocence and unselfconsciousness that charm mankind. In

fact, it is only when the head is added to the torso, with its youthful, but swelling bosom, that the sex is obvious. She has a crown of curling hair parted in the middle, with a fillet bound tightly about it and fastened behind, which bunches out the curls above and below. Little diminutive wavelets escape also upon the columnar neck. The ears are like shells, deep and convoluted, with shapely lobes, and the upper edges bent over as though to catch the prayers and praises of the passing worshippers. The eyebrows are straight and finely drawn, and the delicate eyelids sharply chiselled. The forehead is broad and intellectual, and partly covered by the curling hair. The nose is straight, forming a distinct angle with the brow; the eye sockets are large and far apart, although, alas, the eyes are missing; the chin is softly rounded, but decided, and the sensitive mouth with its full underlip is such as is only seen in unspoilt youth. But the chief quality of this lovely oval face lies in the exquisite curve of the cheeks from the temples to the jaw. There is a suggestion of leanness about them, almost as though they had been fined down by care, and yet they are smooth and without a line. Race and history, the experience of ages and the thoughts of far-off times seem to have moulded their outlines, but left their freshness unimpaired. They belong to the wisdom of immortality and the patience of understanding, and are shaped to a secret that we cannot fathom. There is no other face in all the range of Greek statuary quite comparable to this for that mysterious, elusive element, that indescribable personal quality which elsewhere in art Leonardo da Vinci has known how to picture.

It is at once the most youthful and the most thoughtful face, the serenest and yet fullest of memories, the most maidenly and yet the most serious ever worked in bronze or marble.

It is the whole statue, however, that one must study in order to appreciate what must have been the grandeur and dignity of the original. For the head taken alone gives the impression of being nearly upright, with its neck upon the pedestal; whereas, when fitted in its proper position to the Dresden torso, it is seen to be leaning forward and a little down, gazing at the approaching or departing votaries. The Goddess is wearing the ægis and the simple Doric peplos, a woollen garment reaching to her feet and gathered at the shoulders, and the whole is loosely fastened about her waist with a snaky cord. She is resting her weight upon the right foot, with the left knee slightly bent, the whole attitude graceful and natural. There is a great solemnity about her as she gazes into the future and the past, standing midway between them in this pure and tranquil reverie. She is the protectress of those who have left their parent city, and something more. She is their good angel, their ideal of all that is beautiful and holy in womanhood and religion. She represents their patriotism and deepest feelings. She is the monitress of their conduct, as she watches them leaving her shores and catches sight of them yet afar, when they return, with that divine glance which perceives their inmost thoughts, those eyes of youth that will pity their misfortunes, but turn themselves away from any shameful act. Who will dare to pollute that vision? As we picture her stand-

ing there, immaculate and infinitely charming, looking out over the waters of the harbour, we realize for a moment the genius of ancient Greece and the greatness of her people. They are embodied in this proud and solitary figure that has come down to us only in mutilated copies, but which still has the power of stirring the imagination and exacting the homage of those who see it.

My visit to Bologna drew to a close. Before leaving the hotel I prevailed on the landlord to part with one of his plaster casts, as there were none obtainable in the town, since reproductions of the head were for some reason or other no longer permitted. Instructions were given to deal with it carefully. It was placed in a crate, and in return for a small sum I was allowed to take it away. On arriving, however, at Florence, I discovered that nothing but flimsy paper had been wrapped round it, with no packing of any sort to shield it from the shock of travel. The result consequently was disaster. As it lay before me shattered into fifty pieces, a hopeless and indistinguishable ruin, some of it even reduced to powder, I could have wept in vexation of spirit. Is this the fate, I thought, even of memories, if we wait long enough, and, in the end, will nothing be left of all the pageantry of the past and present but the flying dust from which they came?

XVII

MINOR EXPERIENCES

Looking back over a life which has now lengthened into middle age, incidents, trivial in themselves, are sometimes picked out by the eye of memory with greater clarity than happenings of real importance. Conspicuous, as I gaze behind me now, are four such experiences, disconnected, but unusual, and perhaps, on that account, stored in the mind when others more memorable and far worthier of record have become dim in their outlines or utterly forgotten.

It happened at a private school when I was eleven years of age. The classical tutor was a Mr. Urchard and the class a large one. A long-faced, clean-shaven, tall, lugubrious man, he used to sit behind the desk that faced us and expound the mysteries of Cæsar's Gallic wars. Sideways he would loll, with one leg over the other, resting a hand in an open drawer where the copy-books were kept. This was his favourite attitude and I can visualize him now, patient and melancholy, with furrowed cheeks, long prognathous jaw and sallow complexion. He had been on sick-leave for several weeks and a *locum tenens* had taken his place. It was late autumn and one evening I had occasion to return to the class-room to get a copy-book, for I had left it behind that morning by mistake. The room was at the end of a long, flagged

passage with several turnings and was dimly lit by the last glimmerings of departing day. The drawer of the desk was open and, having extracted the book, I proceeded to push the drawer to, but it would not go home. I tried again, but it stuck fast, and I then looked up and saw the reason. Urchard was sitting in his accustomed place with his long, underhung jaw and yellow face, staring in front of him, one leg over another and his wrist in the drawer. For one moment I stood with curdled blood, staring at him, then turned my back and slowly and stiffly left the room, my wits stunned and body semi-paralysed by the shock of terror. When halfway down the passage I broke into a run and raced back the rest of the way. The following morning the class was held as usual and, while it was in progress, a telegram was brought in and opened by the master, an occurrence witnessed by us in silence. After a moment or two of hesitation he told us that he had just received some news we should all be sorry to hear, namely, that Mr. Urchard had died the evening before and that we should never see him again. How we all received this intelligence I cannot exactly remember, but it must have been without any particular emotion or I should have recollected it. That same afternoon I recounted my experience to a friend. The story got about and reached the ears of the Head. He sent for me, told me I was a liar and had invented the story to frighten the boys, and I endured the painfullest caining of my life. At this distance of time I know not what to think. Did I really believe I had seen a spirit from another world, or was the tale consciously invented to make myself interesting to

my school-fellows and subsequently repeated so often that at length I was really convinced it was true? The recording angel one of these days will turn the pages up.

About ten years later I was travelling in Spain, having gone there to pick up the language and visit various places of historic interest. Among the latter there is none more renowned than the Mosque at Córdova. Built by the Turks some twelve hundred years ago, it has passed through all the vicissitudes of more than a thousand years of Spanish history, and the mark of every age, since first it was founded, has been left upon it. Restorations were in progress at the time and part of a vast and splendid ceiling had been dismantled. This latter was of cedar-wood, composed of large rectangular panels framed in cross-beams in high relief. Beams and panels were exquisitely carved and gave the hall they adorned a warm and sumptuous appearance. As I strolled about it, I noticed that in one of the corners was stacked a fragment of the ceiling which had been taken down. Some other structure had been erected at the end of the hall and a few of the beams and panels had become superfluous, as there was nowhere to put them up again. Now at that time, in my own home, a large room was being added to what was an Elizabethan building and an effort being made to adhere to the ancient style as much as possible, mullioned windows, Tudor wainscoting and old stone tiles. Supposing these discarded beams and panels could be transported to Sussex for the ceiling, would it not be the most ancient, the most interesting in all England? A devouring passion to

obtain them took possession of me. I made inquiries and found that the architect in charge of the alterations was the proper authority to apply to. To him I went. He was a man with a wintry face, but affable, attentive and polite. I adopted a casual, almost a careless tone—that I noticed a few beams and panels were left over, that I should be glad to have them as a memento, before they were finally cast aside, as I had a room in England in which I could put them, where they would always remind me of Spain, of Córdova and of my talk with him. He said that he did not anticipate any difficulty, although in his heart he probably thought me a crazy Englishman for wanting such rubbish, especially as I had mentioned in passing that I would gladly pay something for the privilege of possession. Would I be good enough, however, to refer the matter to His Excellency, the Bishop of Córdova, under whose jurisdiction the mosque was? He would do his best with that dignitary, and he then paused and looked hard at me, and when I turned to go, having nothing more for the moment to say, a disheartened look seemed to cross his lean visage. A couple of hours later I was ushered into the presence of the prelate. He had lately been raised to the Archbishopric of Valencia and was leaving in a few weeks for his new post. He received me courteously and listened to all I had to say. The architect was present, but stood apart like a lackey in a corner of the room. If I recollect aright, we conversed in Spanish and I eked out the poverty of my vocabulary with French and English phrases. I made light of the intrinsic value of the panels. Indeed, I said I took

it for granted that, were it not for me, they would be scrapped as old lumber. Nor did he demur to this. My admiration for all things Spanish, and in particular for the mosque, was so great that any relic would be of intense value to me and I hoped, not indeed in payment for the panels, but in recognition of his devoted labours and the manner in which the restorations were being effected under his auspices, that he would allow me to contribute to 'the funds' one thousand pesetas, or thirty pounds in English money. His Excellency smiled benignly and the beams, I felt, were as good as packed and on board. He thought there would be little or no difficulty in the matter, the pesetas would be much appreciated, and I had begun to discuss the arrangements for the removal and carriage of the goods, when, as though it were an after-thought, he suddenly interjected the question whether I belonged to the 'Church'. For the fraction of a second I hesitated. Was it not justifiable to tell a harmless fib and say 'Yes'? What injury could it do anyone? The Bishop wanted the pesetas and I wanted the ceiling. The architect was indifferent. As for the mosque, the panels were no longer required and, if I did not take them, would be pitched aside and utterly forgotten. The upbringing of twenty years pulled me one way and greed the other. But the issue was never really in doubt. I shrank from deceiving this prelate of the Roman Church and answered him 'Nay'. He paused for a moment, sadly I thought, and said he would like to consult his architect and went over to where the latter was waiting. They conferred in low tones for a few moments and the Bishop, with the

face of a man who has suddenly been deprived of something, came forward once more. His architect had put forward certain considerations which he would like to think over. It was not a matter he would care to settle off-hand. Could I return in a day or two and he would let me know? The beams, after all, might be wanted in the event of repairs. I realized that my case was lost, hopelessly, irretrievably, murmured some non-committal reply, brushed with my lips the signet-ring which sat upon the fat finger, made a deep obeisance and left his present with as much dignity as I could muster. Was my failure due to the fact that I did not belong to the Catholic Church? Was it that I had omitted in the first instance to put myself right with the architect? Or was it possible that they both thought, such a thing never having occurred to them before, that these unconsidered remnants might after all find a richer purchaser elsewhere? Who now can say, but this is how I missed the finest ceiling in England.

Long after this disappointment I was staying for a week-end with friends in Yorkshire. On the evening of my arrival, I happened to ask my host whether there were any interesting neighbours, to which he replied that there was a lady who lived a few fields away who had had a remarkable and chequered career. She had changed her name not long since, but before that had been Mrs. X. I caught my breath.—But a preliminary word about Mrs. X is necessary. She was a Swiss and had held an exceptional position. She had been lovely, clever, charming and ambitious. Statesmen, diplomats, generals, men of letters, financiers, artists, actors, judges had

flocked to her receptions. Indeed, it was no secret that her relations with some of them had been of the most intimate description. She had had confidences in her keeping which, so it was hinted, could have ruined the careers of several public men. Then came a bolt from the blue, for in the midst of this brilliant progress she was suddenly arrested for a peculiarly callous and brutal murder—the strangling with her own hands of one of her own family. She had remained in prison a whole year, undergoing one examination after another, before the verdict was eventually given. During the time of her incarceration, so universal was the horror at the deed, that even the felons who occupied the neighbouring cells, believing as they did in her guilt, tried on several occasions to lynch her. At length the long ordeal came to an end. In a crowded court a verdict of 'Not Guilty' was returned and the curtain lowered upon the great drama. This was the woman who was living almost within a stone's throw, whose name had been blazed throughout the civilized world as one of the monsters of her time; who had endured such cruel trials and had at length come through them, adjudged innocent in spite of all. My hosts had had no intercourse with her. The neighbours, unable to rid themselves of certain uncomfortable feelings, the result of the strangeness of so extraordinary a human document in their midst, had never called upon her. To turn, therefore, to them for an introduction was no good; yet I was consumed with curiosity to gaze upon this woman. She was said to have a rose-garden of exceptional beauty and was not I a lover of roses above all other things on

earth? On the following morning I set out to call on Mrs. X. The countryside was lapped in sunshine and bells were summoning the worshippers to church. After crossing a dewy field or two, then following a little track through a flower-besprinkled wood and and threading a winding lane, I found myself at a lodge-gate and then at the front door. The building was a typical manor-house, nestling among its trees, with old-fashioned grounds, smooth lawns and park-like lands with grazing cattle, the spirit of peace brooding over all. I rang the bell and a watchful, rather secretive-looking maid opened it. She was sorry—her mistress was out. Could I leave a message? I begged her to say that I had ventured to call on a matter of roses. Would there be a chance of seeing her if I called again in the afternoon? Yes, she thought she would be at home. So I arranged to return at four o'clock. Seething however with impatience, I started far too early and had to creep like a snail over the fields and through the wood so as not to arrive before the time. The door was opened by the same enigmatical female. She smiled, and you felt that smiling was not her usual occupation, conducted me into the drawing-room, informed me that her mistress would be down in a moment and there left me. It was a dainty apartment, filled with flowers and well-chosen furniture. The general impression, as I sat waiting, was one of luxury: soft colours, downy cushions, thick rugs into which one's feet noiselessly sank, a subdued light filtering through filmy curtains and a subtly scented air. Photographs of children and mothers, of husbands and wives, of brides and bridegrooms stood on tables, and choice

bibelots were exposed in glass cases. It was a woman's room, a woman of taste and refinement with happy domestic associations. For ten minutes I waited amid absolute silence. At length I heard the rustle of a skirt some way off, then a little nearer—a gay, self-confident skirt. Down the stairs it whisked, whilst I held my breath, and, before I was quite aware of what was actually happening, into the room sailed Mrs. X. The adventure was in full swing. I had expected to see a woman worn and pale, with an extinct and stricken look, in fact, with the imprint of the past in her face. But Mrs. X, under the rejuvenating kiss of established innocence, showed nothing of this. She was plump, radiant, and serene. Her hair was dark and, so far as could be seen, undyed, her complexion smooth and clear, her eye lustrous, her manner easy and forthcoming. There were no observable lines upon her face. She might have been forty, she did not look much more, and greeted me gracefully with the air of a successful woman of the world. Enveloping me with a pair of large and understanding orbs, she said: 'So you have come to talk about roses'—and I knew in a flash that she was aware why I had come. 'My cousin, who is a great rose expert, will be down in a moment and you can have a good chat together.' I must see her beloved rose-garden—and we proceeded to go there. She took more pride in it than in anything else. Roses were her hobby, especially pure white ones. Her roses were her pets. She visited them every day and almost believed that they knew her. Might she give me one of them? And with her large, smooth, strong white hands she plucked a white bud and

placed it in my buttonhole. Did I play croquet? It was her favourite game. Whenever she had a chance she played it. Croquet amused her. It made her laugh so much that she often missed her shots. I must come over and play. Unfortunately, I cannot recollect a tithe of this garden talk. As she strolled among the roses, with her fine bust and shoulders, she looked like a large, full-blown rose herself, without a care in the world. Surely no tragedy could have touched this woman, even with the hem of its robe. There was no dark background here, nothing but light comedy, the felicitous progress of a happy life amid old-world associations and peaceful memories. You would have described her as light-hearted and pleasure-loving, but sensible and clever as well. She did not appear to be as much made-up as the majority of women in society. Her lips, perhaps, were slightly rouged, but otherwise her face seemed to be untouched. Her mouth was large, but well-formed and firm, although a trifle hard, and in spite of her rounded contours she looked powerful and active. She was fashionably but not overdressed, and her figure must have been extremely elegant before it had inclined to stoutness. In fact, she was a handsome woman, young for her years and with a look of perfect health and contentment. After a long interval the cousin made his appearance—a heavy, commonplace, slow-witted fellow. She put a rose in his coat, took us for one more turn round the garden and we then went in to tea. I had been looking forward to this meal—a little unconventional gathering with ample opportunity for close observation. There I could have watched Mrs. X smiling at her

guests, dispensing hospitality, talking of the present and the future, about everything in the world but the dreaded past. Here, perhaps, I might at length catch a glimpse of what I had expected to see, but which was overlaid by that smooth, impenetrable mask. However, it was not to be. There was a nice little corner in the loggia where her cousin and I, so she said, could talk about roses undisturbed, and plates and cups were put for us there, and for three-quarters of an hour, with my back to the others, I had to exchange purposeless and idiotic remarks upon a subject about which I knew nothing with this dull bumpkin of a man. I could hear the laughter and voices of the others, and this was the revenge of Mrs. X. Before we sat down she had introduced a friend who was staying in the house. He was, she explained, a German who had come to England to study the language. He had only been over for a few weeks, but she had never known anyone who had picked it up so quickly. Neither had I. His pronunciation, as it seemed to me, was well-nigh perfect, his vocabulary extensive and well-chosen, his phraseology idiomatic and easy. I complimented him. He bowed and smiled, but appeared to think lightly of it. Later on, I complimented him again and, when I bade him farewell, once more gave expression to my admiration, exclaiming that I had never met a German who spoke our tongue with greater fluency, and that it was truly astonishing after only six weeks' practice. He smiled and bowed again and then informed me that it was Mrs. X's little joke, for he was an Englishman born and bred. For the second time did that lady show that she was

not quite so dense as she believed I had presumed to think her. When tea was over I was able to shake off the rose expert and we all conversed on general topics. Mrs. X drew me aside and during a tour of the room showed me her photographs, among them that of the victim who had been done to death. Soon there was no excuse to remain any longer and I prepared to depart. Mrs. X and her cousin accompanied me along the drive to the lodge-gate. Every incident of this visit is still clear in my memory. I recollect how by the side of the road a cat was playing with a mouse. The latter, which had been badly mauled, could scarcely crawl. It was trying to get away, but each time the cat would immediately place her paw upon it. I wanted to put the little creature out of its misery, but my hostess told me not to bother about it and we went on. At the lodge-gate we parted amid a salvo of thanks on my side and hopes expressed on hers that we should meet again. The final words I can remember her saying, as I held her fingers and bade her good-bye, were: 'Don't forget to ring me up!' Before turning the corner on to the main road, I took one look back. Her head was framed in a large white hat, the loutish cousin was standing beside her, she waved her hand and blew me a kiss, and that was the last I saw of her. Only a faint echo of this adventure has reached me since it took place. A year or two back my host for that memorable weekend told me that, shortly afterwards, he had met Mrs. X's relative and that the latter had remarked, in rather a disillusioned tone of voice, that he had been thinking the matter over and had come to the conclusion that the gentleman,

who had been over to see them, had been quite wrong about some of the names of the roses.

Only ten or eleven years ago, and yet it seems as far off as the Spanish visit, I was travelling by the then London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. The porter had placed my despatch-box beside me in an empty third-class carriage facing the engine. I occupied the far corner, and had myself carried and deposited on the seat opposite a small, but heavy steel box containing some of the most valuable of the ancient Greek coins I was then collecting. The train was about to start, when a pale, undersized little fellow jumped in and seated himself in the other corner of my side of the carriage. I took stock of him out of the tail of my eye. He was miserably clad and looked wild-eyed, desperate and half-starved. He had no luggage nor any overcoat, although it was a cold winter's day, not even a stick or umbrella, and was wearing, I remember, a soft cap. Of me he took not the slightest notice, but his eyes never left the steel box. I covertly studied his expression. He was obviously down-and-out and reckless. We moved out of the station and my mind began to work. It was a comparatively fast train, with only one stop, at Horley, between Victoria and Three Bridges. Before reaching Horley there was a long tunnel and recollections of at least two murders, one of them quite recent, in this well of darkness crossed my mind. What was I to do? My man never stirred; he was still gazing intently at the steel box. He looked like an *apache*, rat-faced, livid and dangerous. What was he doing here, where was he going? Why was he so still? Although he had never glanced

my way, my presence, I felt in every part of me, was all-important to him. Then I remembered. At the bottom of my despatch-box lay an automatic pistol which for some years I had kept in the country ready loaded, and the box having for some reason I forget been taken to London, was now being returned to its accustomed place. With quiet deliberation I opened it with my key, so that the lid stood up with its back to the other passenger; then lifted the tray and, rustling some papers, got the weapon out of its holster and slipped aside the safety-catch. These manœuvres were all hidden from view by the lid and we were now approaching the tunnel. But the little man had not been deceived. By the look on his face I knew at once that he was conscious of what had transpired. His attitude relaxed, he slumped in his seat and the tension was over. But I kept my hand on the pistol, for I was resolved, were he to make any threatening movement, to take no risk. We entered the tunnel, passed through it and at Horley came to a halt. As the train ran slowly into the station he got up quickly, crossed the carriage and, never once having looked in my direction, nor looking at me now, respectfully lifted his cap as he opened the door and stepped out. Was he an innocent traveller like myself and had I frightened him out of his wits? Or had he meant to be a killer that afternoon and believed that he had run up against an armed detective by mistake? Was he aware that the steel box contained valuables and had he watched me into the empty carriage, or was he some poor destitute wretch with desperate thoughts wholly elsewhere? I shall never know.

When I reached my destination I replaced the pistol in its holster; but, before doing so, had a look at it and found that it was not loaded after all!

Why do not greater episodes stand out as clearly —the death of parents, marriage, election to Parliament, the trenches in France, the discovery of dread disease? Occurrences that changed one's life are shrouded in mist, whilst secondary happenings assume in the memory all the importance of prime events. Is it that the surface of the mind is for the moment quiescent, undisturbed by those waves of emotion that sweep over it from time to time, and that it therefore takes an impress more faithfully than when agitated by stronger and stormier tides of feeling? Looking back upon periods of crisis, details have almost disappeared. Acute joys can no longer be recovered, and is it not as well, for who would also live again the hours of agony that now are past?

XVIII

THE ALBERT HALL CRICKET CLUB

It was in the year 1933 that the Club was brought suddenly to our notice, on an exquisite evening in June at about ten o'clock, summer-time. The topmost figure on the dome of the Victoria and Albert Museum stood out like a cameo in the purple sky, and the green acacias in the garden of our Square seemed rooted in stillness, unstirred by a single breath of a breeze. Cricket had been the universal theme for many days—the dæmonic bowling of Guthrie, the brilliant displays of Wart and Humble at the wicket, the cruel disappointment when Moony broke his thumb, the exuberant rejoicings when messages of victory were flashed across the water. Every poster was full of the subject—'Can Grobel do it?'—'Moony speaks his mind'—'Wart's mother hears the news'—'Humble's hundred'. There was little other talk. Solemn civil servants, bishops, judges, barbers, bill-brokers, uncles and nephews, clubmen, dustmen, barmen, shopmen, statesmen, draymen, every kind of man bought the papers and scanned the latest scores. Vital statistics, Cabinet meetings, slum clearance, the League of Nations, the sterilization of the unfit, the remarkable new drama by Basher, even the imminent World Conference at the Geological Museum had to take a second place. Cricket was

the all-devouring topic of the hour, so at least the Press gave us to understand, and the newspaper-men know their job.

It was in the midst of this fervour of patriotic rivalry that we were unexpectedly approached by the Albert Hall Cricket Club for a contribution. Now, subscriptions are all very well at their proper season and in due measure. But the hour has nearly struck when a calm review will have to be made of these ever increasing demands upon the charitable impulses of the sorely burdened citizen—concerts for the police, concerts for the postmen, outings for the schools, church repairs, presentations to worn-out worthies, old folks' treats, the prevention of cruelty to animals, flag days, operatic and cage-bird societies, swimming and athletic clubs, the Salvation Army, the British Legion, the Dogs' Home, the Working-men's Institute, the Primrose League, the sick and benevolent fund, the Boy Scouts, the Blind League, the Ratepayers' Association and many other dozen. The public is never quit of them, never left unharried from one year's end to another. So that when we were asked for a contribution to the Albert Hall Cricket Club, the first reaction was a frosty one and the spiritual mercury sank to zero. Yet the title was notable; for what can be more representative of London, of the Metropolitan outlook than the Albert Hall? There you can see the British public in its every mood, in every conceivable phase of temper, taste, activity and partizanship, at concerts, mass-meetings, boxing-matches and balls, at its best and worst, gayest and dullest. To be a player for the Albert Hall Cricket Club was therefore surely to *be*

someone, to be associated with the great tidal processes of the multitude, with the arts and sciences, with politics, history, religion, sport, causes, enthusiasms and Destiny; while to be a subscriber might well be an honour that had been heretofore too casually overlooked.

There turned out to be only six players in the Club for the moment, but they were a valiant company with one bat between them. This was carried by the Captain; three others bore a stump apiece—there were no bails—and a fifth looked after the ball, while the latest recruit was held to be too inexperienced for the guardianship of Club property, even if there had been any left over to protect. They were beyond all question an indomitable and adventurous band, and we came upon them all of a sudden that evening, near the gardener's bothie which lay hidden in a clump of laurel just inside the latter's private entrance to the grounds. For some weeks past we had been noticing things. Have you ever had the feeling, Sir, of unseen presences about you, the sensation of being spied upon in a secret but not unfriendly fashion by invisible beings who are waiting for you to be out of the way? For it was this we had been conscious of for some little time, whenever in the twilight we strolled round the garden in and out of its winding paths. More than once, when we had locked the gate behind us and taken a look back, as one is apt to do before recrossing one's own threshold, more than once, I say, we had observed things, or thought we had—small heads peering round the ends of the line of iron palings facing our windows and so instantaneously withdrawn that, for the life

of you, one could not have sworn that they were not a trick of light. At times too, rounding a corner of the railings outside in the Square, a diminutive figure would dart up almost from under one's feet and make off with incredible speed across the road and down a side-street. It was as though the spot had been chosen as their playground by a community of elves or leprechauns who, at certain hours of the evening, emerged from their hiding-places to relax and disport themselves at the fall of day. It was in the garden itself that we used to feel most powerfully the occult presences, as we strolled about the lawns and under the branches, between sunset and dark. There were rustlings and sudden starts, whisperings and snapping of twigs, and occasionally gnome-like shapes were glimpsed or imagined disappearing into the fringes of thick shrub or behind trees. And so gradually we made up our minds that the garden was haunted, or rather that it was the abode of the little men, and, far from being perturbed, we liked to dwell upon the thought that this green oasis in the midst of so much ugliness and commonplace was the chosen habitation of these elfin fellows, who in this mysterious manner had elected to make a home there.

Then, one evening, all these supernatural surmises were swept away. For at least an hour we had wandered over the garden, more conscious than ever that invisible beings were all about us, intensely active and close at hand. Though we could see nothing of them with any definiteness, we knew they were there, watching us, eluding us, aware of everything we did and said. Leafy surfaces would darkly

open and then slowly close again, a shadow would be thrown across a strip of grass, a faint sibilant call would sound from somewhere. It was an expedition of discovery, systematically undertaken, that eventually disclosed the solution of the problem, bringing us upon them without warning at about ten o'clock that night, in a small clearing never previously visited by us, surrounded with laurel and containing the hut where tools were kept. There they stood, six little boys, ranging from eight to twelve, with their heads together like conspirators, holding a whispered conference. The leader seemed to be giving instructions and the others were gathered closely about him, gazing up into his face with rapt attention. We had caught them unawares at last, the leprechauns of the Square, the first time probably that any other human eye had seen them thus, and there was no escape, for we filled the entrance and barred the way. They had of course no right to be in the garden at all, as not only were they uninscribed as residents in the ledgers of the local estate agents, but they could have shown you no card of admission, and so were trespassers and, what was even worse, burglars, since they were nightly accustomed to open the gardener's gate with a bent wire and make free of the hut and any of its contents.

Now, for the general run of mankind the predicament in which they thus found themselves would have been, to say the least of it, a trifle delicate, one requiring most expert handling, simple yet plausible explanation, if not apology, followed by a rapid and tactful retreat. But these gentlemen were of a different mould, of the stuff that heroes, conquerors

and pioneers are made of, the stuff that fashioned Drake and Cromwell and Clive and Nelson. They betrayed no signs of perturbation whatsoever, nor any sense of moral delinquency. There appeared to be no dilemma for them in the situation at all, either physical or social, but with perfect composure and a dignity unmatchable by any of those confronting them, the eldest immediately stepped forward and said: 'Mister, will yer give us a subscription to the Albert Hall Cricket Club?'

We were dumbfounded, out of countenance, nonplussed, sidetracked, for the moment utterly silenced. And then Jimmy Oates called his team to the front, the raggedest crew you ever beheld, with their bat, stumps, ball—an old discard from a tennis court—and a piece of crooked wire. One by one they were presented—Alf Carver, Fred Gravity, Bill Lightfoot, Bertie Speed and 'Jack Hobbs', the youngest, all with homes in the shadow of the Albert Hall, all of them British sportsmen doing their bit for the great national game. For us there was only one course to pursue. These cricketers must be taken seriously and the Club supported. The hut, we were informed, was the headquarters, the pitch the miserable patch on which we found ourselves, the rival team any set of ragamuffins who could be induced to challenge them. So we handed them half a crown, gazed mutely and wonderingly upon them for a minute and then, wishing them the best of luck, beat a retreat. It was the least we could do, for, as they stood their ground there, unwashed and almost naked, with the old bat, the stumps, the ball and the piece of wire, we realized that in some indescribable way

they were representative of England, of its youth and enterprise, its tenacity, purpose and courage; that they were bred from the same stock that for five rich centuries had adventured in every land, in every clime and on every sea. The Albert Hall Cricket Club, we felt, was justly entitled to that high-sounding appellation and we knew further that, on this summer evening of June 1933, it had won its first match.

XIX

CARRIE

My granddaughter is four years old and the most perfect companion in the world. She understands me completely, and I her. Indeed, until she understood me, I never quite understood myself; for I am a boy at heart, quite a little boy. In some ways she is older than I am. There are certain reserves about her which I lack, a poise, a dignity, in which I am deficient; and she can put me in my place at times with a look or a word which is conclusive, final and beyond retort.

There is all womanhood in that little figure. Every morning at ten she descends the stairs to go for an outing in the Park. It may be a pink hat or a blue that she is wearing, or a white one with yellow blossoms round it, but I can always be sure of this, that it will exactly suit her and have been carefully thought out to coincide with the latest fashion and produce the full effect. You should see the tradesmen, chauffeurs, postmen, old ladies, young gentlemen, policemen, coalmen, dustmen and sundry watching her cross the road on the way to the garden that stands in the middle of our London Square. All business for the moment is at a standstill. Even the grocer's boy, who is flirting with the scullery-maid on the area steps, interrupts his philandering to gaze

at her progress. She is Queen of our house, as royal a personage as ever had subjects to bend the knee, and this homage she accepts as to the manner born, graciously and calmly as her rightful due.

She is a prolific conversationalist, asking for and imparting information, but, like most dames, apt to be illogical on occasion and a trifle prejudiced where her emotional interests are nearly concerned. There is no such thing as seeing both sides of a question, or the weighing up of evidence for and against. The personal equation carries the day every time and argument then is of no avail. But she is a wonderful listener, and Heaven has given no greater gift to charm the sons of men. What twaddle I have talked, God forgive me, when she has looked at me with those large, limpid eyes, nor yawned, nor turned away in boredom, but accepted with angelic faith the nonsense I was babbling. Not that she could really have believed it, but hers are the manners of a great lady. She would not for the world have hurt my feelings, and was aware of course of everything that was passing in my breast. I was anxious, as she knew, to please, doing my utmost to interest and entertain, and, however tedious and prosy I might be, was it likely that she would allow me to suspect the truth?

The butcher said last week that she was the prettiest little woman he had ever seen. He means well, that man, and I have always liked him and appreciated his joints; but he lacks the power of felicitous expression. Pretty is not the word I should have used myself. In truth, I detest it and always have. I've nothing against a pretty fellow, or a pretty piece of

work, or even a pretty kettle of fish; but human loveliness is not pretty nor ever can be. To be able to describe loveliness is not an accident, but a career, and your vehicle has to be faultlessly right. Poetry may convey what is lovely, but hardly prose. 'Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium?' That is what the butcher really meant and what he would have said had he been Dr. Faustus. The baker did a trifle better a day or two later when he called her a regular little daisy, although there again I don't care for the adjective much. There is an insufficiency of romance about the word regular, and daisies are a flower that I have never especially admired. Sparrows and daisies, daisies and sparrows—I bracket them together in the floral and avian worlds. There is a lack of rarity about them; they are too ubiquitous. The baker however was on the right tack and with a little more taste might have made a hit. For Carrie is a flower, though a flower with a soul, and what a difference lies in that! Hers is the beauty of all the flowers, from the pale innocent primrose to the passionate poppy with its cup of fire.

Yes, I have seen her passionate; have seen my Princess in a temper. But what of that? Did not Cleopatra sometimes lose her head, and Queen Elizabeth, and Joan of Arc, and Eve? And was there no provocation when on that shimmering evening last Sunday, discoursing with Master Humphrey upon matters of moment, she was tactlessly asked to return to the cheerlessness of her chamber? For some few days he had evinced a lover-like devotion, meeting her in the garden, by accident as it were,

and showing her the sights with a lordly air, for he was two years her senior and a gentleman of considerable experience. For the first time in her life her own dominant personality had seemed to be in abeyance, subdued, and willingly, to his greater mastery of the situation, and into her manner there had crept a new-born something, an interest, a shy tenderness, that had been denied even to me. Is it surprising then, when on the threshold of this new romance she was bidden back to her own room, that revolt should have flamed in those damask cheeks, and tears welled from under the long lashes amid a storm of protest. It was a bitter moment, and what must have made it harder to bear was Humphrey's indifference to her pain and rage. No effort did he make in solace or support, but, seeing her defeated, turned his back most shamefully.

The reason for my being moved to write at such length is that Carrie has been our guest for the last ten days, a memorable event in the history of the house. A couple of rooms on the third floor are allotted to her, and two stalwart dames wait upon her table and her toilette hand and foot. In accordance with traditional custom she has all her meals in privacy upstairs, so that I have never personally seen a morsel of food pass those cherry lips. But I have noted the delicacies being carried up and the empty dishes on their way back and can imagine the feastings on that upper floor. Every morning we greet one another on the stairs. She is an early riser and about betimes to take her morning stroll, and when I hear her voice as her door opens, for I keep my own ajar for the purpose, I am out of my room in a jiffy to

meet her halfway down. Our ground floor is really a farmyard with a loft and cowshed attached to it, though it is a great secret and you might not think so by the look of it. Things, however, are never quite what they appear to be and the younger you are the more easily are you able to pierce the veil that wraps them round. As you get older the world is inclined to crystallize and harden into unalterable shapes, and you are deluded into thinking that what seems, really is. Carrie and I know better. Our ground floor, as I have said, is a farmyard in reality, and obviously so for anyone whose vision has not been blurred by age. Her conventionally-minded escort may think that Carrie is peeping at me through the banisters, but that of course is ridiculous, for she is looking in fact through the yard gate, while I have climbed on a heap of turnips and am staring back at her over the fence. That again is not the bath-water running away on a top floor, as Nanny would have it, but the hen who has just laid an egg, clucking in satisfaction to let us know that there will be something to eat for breakfast tomorrow—cluck-cluck-cluck, cluck-cluck. These elderly people positively see and hear nothing. 'Don't let Sweep chase those chicken, Carrie.—Come here, Sweep, lie down! —How rough he is!—Bow wow, bow wow, bow wow, bow wow—we shall have to tie him up, for he is getting worse and worse and will stop the fowls laying altogether if he goes on like this.—Let's see how much water there is in the well.' Nanny just now blindly called it a coalscuttle. The water is getting very low and we can't even reach it with our fingers. Luckily a heavy downpour comes on and we open

our umbrellas and sit under them till the well fills up. This farmstead takes a lot of looking after, what with the dog and the chicken, and keeping the gate shut and feeding the cow when it begins to moo—moo, moo, moo, moo. And then Carrie wants a ride on the old cart-horse, so she is given a leg up, and off we go round the yard. But Dandy is a trifle mettlesome, although a bit long in the tooth, and lets out a kick or two.—'Whoa there! Steady my lad!'—And he is greedy also, for he stops at the rick that leans over the hedge, pulling out the hay, and won't move on however much you beat him. The elderly escort by now is getting impatient, doing her best to smile at what she regards as an absurd make-believe, but finding it difficult to keep it up. She little knows that she herself is the make-believe and that Carrie and I and the farmyard are the real thing, so intensely real that, when I return to my desk after the front door shuts behind them, everything seems to be unnatural, artificial and dream-like—the pen in my hand, the staring pictures on the wall, the faded carpet—and I long to wake up and return to life.

The fortnight's visit has come to an end, and I said good-bye to Carrie this morning. The luggage blocked up the whole of the passage downstairs, and the sight of it made me so melancholy that I shut my door on the preparations and did not open it again until the final moment of parting had arrived. I wanted to get it over quickly, as though it were merely a matter of form. What I had expected I scarcely know. Had I half hoped to see the tears gather in her eyes as I held her little hand in mine?

If so, I was disappointed. She certainly seemed to be excited, and in fact said to me—'I am very excited, grandpa'—but she behaved and looked, not as though she were bidding farewell to a dear friend, but as if she were off on a wild, delicious holiday, a new adventure. There was not a trace of sadness or sentiment on her part, nor tremor of emotion, not one sigh of regret at quitting the house where she had been so happy and so spoilt. She looked more beautiful than ever. Her hat was a new one, tied under her chin with little coloured ribbons, and she tripped upon her toes as though she were balanced on air. As for me, I knew not what to do, whether to appear grieved or gay; but it mattered not at all, for her thoughts were so taken up with coming things that she would never have noticed either way. As a mark of special favour, in gratitude perhaps for so much knightly service, she allowed me to imprint one solitary kiss upon a satin cheek and in the next moment was gone. A small gloved hand waved in adieu was the last sight I had of her.

How empty the house felt! Not a sound in it after all the comings and goings of the last fourteen days. As I sat at my desk staring in front of me, I seemed to put off my youth, to become an old man at last, to believe that things are what they seem. And yet of an evening, when the servants are all out and the place is quite still, I can sometimes hear Sweep chasing the chicken, and the hen clucking, and the cow munching the hay: and my room turns for a moment or two into a farmyard, and the gate and the well and Dandy are before me once again.

XX

GRANDPAPA

I can only dimly remember my grandfather, for I was barely eleven years old when he died. But he was so fine a figure that I want to rescue him from the limbo of fading memories, for my own satisfaction and for love of him, before it is too late. He seems a long way off, deeply embedded in the remote past, though he looms gigantic when I think of those early days, a misty giant, it is true, but worshipped and beloved. A few more years, another spring or two, a few more russet autumns, and he may be much nearer, once again a close companion —who knows? . . .

There is pandemonium raging in the dining-room. He and I are squatting on the floor face to face, wielding mallets. We are hammering some loose boards with all our might, without a word, with furious concentration of purpose. He looks very grim, for the job is of the first consequence and has to be finished in the next few seconds. The rest of the family have just returned from London and are already in the hall. At length the door is opened and they enter. My grandfather and I redouble our efforts, taking no notice of these strangers. The noise is deafening. They stand in the doorway transfixed with astonishment, while my grandfather, who is seventy-five, whirls his arm like a lusty lad. At

length we desist and a voice asks—'What on earth are you doing?'—and I reply with an accent of studied indifference—'Can't you see we are carpenters?'—I was about five years of age at the time, but shall never forget the feeling of satisfaction at our having put up such a first-class show.

We often walked through the woods together or over the farm. Wherever we went people would regard him with attention and admiration, for he was tall and broad-shouldered, with a distinguished carriage and handsome head. There was a great dignity about him and yet a gentleness that won you over, a grave somewhat stern expression, but illumined by a smile that was irresistible; and, combined with all these, a character for integrity in all his dealings that nothing ever smirched. This, of course, I learnt later. For me, at the time, he was merely the most fascinating of comrades, far more approachable even than my parents, more comprehensive of my childish mental states, game for any kind of adventure at any time. That was it, we were adventurers together, in league against all spoil-sports. I never had the impression of his doing his best to amuse me or of bringing himself down to my level. He had retained a large slice of the zest of youth and threw himself into whatever he did with all his soul, and his obvious relish communicated itself, and the huge gap of the years between us dwindled to a point. Now and again he would take a gun with him and bowl over a rabbit or two and I would help carry them home on a stick. He was one of the best shots in the county and had few equals for his age with a rifle.

One such walk, when I was about seven, comes

back to me with vivid clarity. It must have been a summer's day, for there were some young pheasants and coops in a field. My grandfather carried a gun and we paused to look at a gruesome gibbet, hung with vermin nailed to a pole, stoats, rats, weasels and other bloodthirsty, predatory things. There was adventure in the air, for we were to have tea in the keeper's cottage, my first meal away from home. On the way we had passed a small house occupied by a labourer whose daughter was dying of consumption. It was a tragic tenement and, whenever the nurses took us by it, we would look up at the little pane of the room where we knew she lay. The window was always sealed and she was getting worse and worse, thinner and thinner, so we were told. A bunch of immortelles dangled from a string outside the sash, swinging in the breezes against the wall, and occasionally, when our voices had been heard, a white, emaciated hand could be seen raised in greeting against the glass, for her bed was just under it. She lasted for several years, longer far than had been expected, and, although I never saw her, she seemed to be part and parcel of those early years and, when I heard she had died, I felt I had lost someone who had almost belonged to my own life, a pathetic, half-angelic being, and that a gap had been made that never would be filled again.

We came at length to the keeper's cottage where we were welcomed by Mrs. Sessions. Her figure is very shadowy, a busy, chattering, bustling woman. My grandfather sat at the parlour table with his back to the front door and I on his right hand. For me there had never been such a feast, nor was there ever

to be one like it again. A new-laid egg had been boiled and stood before me on my plate. I can taste it now, the first I ever had for tea, delicious with its rich yolk and milky white, straight from the clucking hen but a few hours since. How my grandfather joked during the meal! How we laughed and crammed the slices of bread-and-butter into our mouths! Mrs. Sessions' health was drunk by us both, our cups held high, while a man peeped in at the window and the dogs in the kennels barked outside. There was a tame jackdaw too picking up crumbs. Now they are all dead like the green leaves of that summer's day, rotted, underfoot, annihilated, with not a trace of one of them left behind.

What a stream of questions would pour upon my companion during these rambles, and he had an answer for every one. It was in the carriage-drive about two years later that I asked him one day if he was a millionaire. Sessions had said so. Whom was he going to leave his property to? The keepers thought someone would get a tidy bit, and a peculiar look came into his face. It was late autumn and the leaves of the beeches lay thickly on the ground. He had only a short span to live and I think it was the last time I went out with him. He somehow evaded this latter question. It seemed to hang in the air, isolated, significant. We were walking slowly that day and there was a more serious note about our comradeship. Even at this distance I can recollect a sort of solemnity in the occasion. Did he feel that his end was near and that this might be our last walk together? I remember the exact spot where this conversation took place and call to mind how, after

my question, we turned about to go back home.

It was in his London house a couple of years later that one afternoon he bid me a final farewell, though I little guessed at the time that I should never see him again. He was suffering from *angina pectoris* and sat propped in an arm-chair, exhausted by the pain. He had grown gaunter in the last few months, and his coat hung baggily upon him. Great veins stood out upon his wasted hands and his eyes were closed. But when I was brought in he brightened up and told me to sit near him. I slipped my hand in his and he was silent for a while. We were alone in the room together. Then he said, 'Give me a cushion, darling', and I put one under his shoulders. 'Thank you, darling', he said. At that moment someone came in and I was led away, but I heard him murmur as the door closed behind me: 'Good-bye, darling'. One of the paroxysms must have been imminent and they did not want me to be there. That was the last I saw of him. I remember his coffin, buried in flowers, standing in the library in the country, but I was too young to realize how much had happened. It was only afterwards that I mourned his death, long years afterwards, when those days of unspoilt youth came back to me on a wave of yearning. And to-night, as I write this, I mourn his loss as never before and, brief as the remnant of life must now be, would give a fair portion of it to be back once again for an hour, holding his hand, tramping through the woods and over the fields, listening, with glad, unshadowed heart, to the romance of his talk and the deep tones of that loved voice.